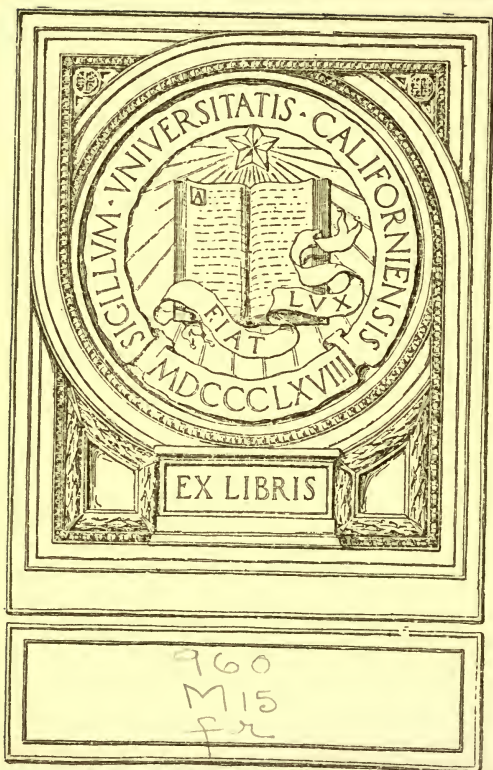


Franklin
by
Constance D'Arey Mackay

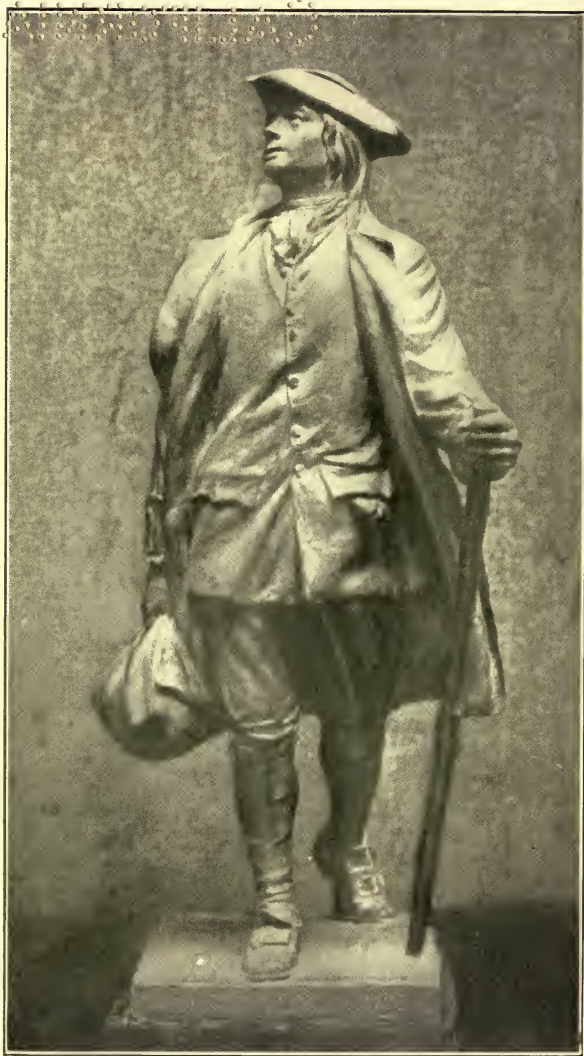




BY
CONSTANCE D. MACKAY

THE HOUSE OF THE HEART
THE SILVER THREAD
PATRIOTIC PLAYS AND PAGEANTS
HOW TO PRODUCE CHILDREN'S PLAYS
THE BEAU OF BATH
COSTUMES AND SCENERY FOR AMATEURS
THE FOREST PRINCESS
THE LITTLE THEATRE IN AMERICA
PATRIOTIC DRAMA IN YOUR TOWN
FRANKLIN

Box of Carpenter



Color-Tone, engraved for THE CENTURY, by H. Davidson.

THE YOUTHFUL FRANKLIN

FROM THE STATUE BY R. TAIT MCKENZIE

On the Campus of the University of Pennsylvania.

Reproduced by courtesy of the sculptor and of The Century.

FRANKLIN

BY
CONSTANCE D'ARCY MACKAY



NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1922

70 VIRI
ANSTONIAO

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PREFACE

In this play of *Franklin* the aim has been to give a picture of the man while keeping as close to historical data as possible. All of the events in the play have a foundation of fact, and all of the characters save Bretelle had their counterparts in Franklin's life: Bretelle represents an epitome of the forces against which Franklin strove—the meanness, the spying, the trickery with which he had to contend.

But dramatic exigency sometimes makes it necessary, on occasion, to temper fact with fancy, and in the sequence of events, story-cohesion has necessitated certain slight changes. Actions covering a longer period of years have had to be compressed into a few years' time. An instance of this is Deborah Read's marriage to Aaron Rogers. Mystery has surrounded, and always will surround this particular episode, and here the dramatist may perhaps be pardoned for supplying a motive. Again, in the matter of secret diplomacy the content and effect of the de Weissenstein letter has been heightened to make possible a climax. (See *Notes on Historic Sources*, page 188). Every one who has delved in the archives knows how matters stood before the French Treaty was signed. "It was then that Franklin quietly drew from his pocket a piece of paper stating an unexpected counter-claim, so cogent,

and of such kind that, rather than face it or dispute it, the English commissioners gave up their point at once. . . . On the day following this masterly stroke the preliminary treaty was signed, sealed and delivered."

Those wishing to follow the part which "secret documents" played in the negotiations can read of the matter in full in the *Diplomatic Correspondence*; in the volumes by Hale, and Parton, and in a fascinating study in *Everyman's Library*, edited by Ernest Rhys; while the prankish side of Franklin's statesmanship is quaintly revealed in the *Letters of Junius* by Benjamin Waterhouse. (See *Notes on Historic Sources*, page 190.)

As to the American Revolution—is it not now being reinterpreted by students of history, who see in a new light the curious phenomena of a German king on the throne of England defying the gallant pro-Americanism of such great Englishmen as Chatham and Fox in order to subdue through Brunswickian military measures a country whose citizens were mainly of British blood, a state of affairs referred to by Franklin himself as "*an Edict by the King of Prussia*."

On the stage side of practical simplification for what may at first seem to be a highly elaborate production the reader is referred to the final chapter on staging. The cast is of necessity a lengthy one, but it is possible by duplication of characters to give it with a much smaller number. Suggestions along these lines are made on page 195.

FRANKLIN

(A Play in Four Acts).

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I: Keimer's Printing Press, Philadelphia, 1723.

ACT II: The Same. A Year and a half Later.

ACT III: Franklin's House in Philadelphia, 1764.

ACT IV, SCENE I: Franklin's Hotel at Passy, 1778.

ACT IV, SCENE II: Hall des Ambassadeurs, Versailles, a Week Later.

CHARACTERS

POTTS
AUSTIN } Printers
BRETTELLE }

SAMUEL KEIMER

DEBORAH READ

AARON ROGERS

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

GREENIE, a Printer's Apprentice

SIR WILLIAM KEITH

A WOMAN

MR. KNOX

MR. ANDREWS

MR. BRAITHWAITE

MR. MURRAY

} Members of the Philadelphia
Assembly

RICHARD AUSTIN

LETITIA BRAITHWAITE

LORD ROCKMINSTER

PARTON, a Servant

COUNTESS DE SARNAC

DUCHESS DE CLEARY


MR. BRADLEY, American Messenger

LORD STORMOUNT, British Ambassador

MONS. GERARD, Secretary of the King's Council

COUNT DE VERGENNES

Citizens of Philadelphia, people of the court of
France, savants, diplomats, lackeys, etc., etc.



FRANKLIN

ACT I

Scene: Keimer's printing press in Philadelphia, 1723. A darkish room below the level of the street, with walls that are dingy and smoke-stained. In center background a door giving on the street, with smudged windows each side of it. In left background a stone hearth with a wide mouthed chimney. Bellows; a hearth broom; a kettle; a long-handled warming pan; wood for replenishing the fire. Near hearth a three-legged stool. Above the hearth a shelf with pewter candlesticks, some single, and some branched. At left, up stage, a door reached by three steps. It leads into Keimer's house. At left, down stage, a counter with packages of paper, printed paper and books. Behind the counter a chair. Behind this a wig and coat. Right down stage, a wooden bench. On it a litter of ink balls, paper, a printing frame. Further up the printing press. Near it a stand for setting type. Mufflers and battered hats hang on the wall behind it. Pale Autumn sunlight comes through the windows. During the scene it fades from the rose of sunset to the gray of dusk, and from that to the black of night. Throughout the scene a fire smolders on the hearth.

*At Rise: Three printers are seen at work. Potts is blond and lankish. Austin is wiry and dark. He appears to be about five and twenty. Bretelle is a young Frenchman of medium height. He has pale brown hair and eyes, and a rat-like face. He seems to be about eighteen. Is exceedingly clever and quick with his hands, but offsets this by idling every spare minute. They are working with pauses, wherein Bretelle runs to fix fire, or to gaze out the window and report on what is passing. It is on one of these expeditions that the rise of the curtain catches him.**

POTTS

Any sight of Greenie?

* The discussion of printed stage directions is a good deal like the discussion of footlights, or no footlights. It has been found that for certain effects the latter cannot altogether be done away with. So, too, with stage directions or "business." It is true that in many modern plays the so-called stage business is like a paragraph in a story. But there are times, especially in a play when there is continual coming and going, and where the stage positions of a large cast have a direct bearing on the action, when such story-like directions only serve to confuse the reader, and clutter the page. Such plays as *Hamilton*, *Disraeli*, and *The First Lady of the Land* have moments when it is imperative for the reader to know the exact position of each character in the scene, or the full significance of the scene is lost. It then becomes a question as to which method is best to use, and undoubtedly the sharpest and most incisive way of indicating involved action is the ancient method wherein "right," "left," or "background" are clearly indicated.

BRETTELLE

Devil a sight!

(He replenishes fire)

POTTS

'Tis only to Burlington he was sent. That's but seventeen miles. D'ye think he's missed the stage coach, or run away?

AUSTIN

Faith, if he's run, the more fool he! They'll be sure to catch him, and you know what happens to run-away apprentices. . . .

POTTS

Ten lashes and a bread and water diet! I tried it once, but never a second time. I'd sooner take Keimer's wage that's as rotten as last year's apples.

BRETTELLE

Mon Dieu! Seven shillings a week to keep body and soul alive! And our work from dark till dark.

AUSTIN

(Clapping him on the shoulder)

Come, lad. Remember night, and the joys of the tavern!

POTTS

Keimer would take even that joy from us if he

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FRANKLIN

could. Only the other day he says "Work over time and I'll give you extra pay!" D'ye think the little Keimer'd give could buy my nights from me, my nights at the tavern?

(Indignantly)

Lord!

BRETELLE

When I think of Keimer and his wage . . .

AUSTIN

(Soothingly)

'Tis only a little lower than the wage they pay printers everywhere.

POTTS

Curse take them, one and all!

AUSTIN

(Warily)

Take care, Potts!

BRETELLE

You're safe! Keimer's out looking for a sight of Greenie. I'll keep watch for him. You can trust me.

(Looks out)

Ha!

POTTS

What's passing now?

FRANKLIN

11

BRETELLE

The coach of the Governor, Sir William Keith.

POTTS

Folks say Sir William is the best judge of books and paper this side of London.

BRETELLE

If I was a lord I would not leave the Court of London for a bourgeoisie town like Philadelphia—not even to be Governor.

POTTS

The smaller the puddle, the bigger the toad. In Philadelphia the Governor fares like a king. But you can't understand these things, Frenchy, being half French and half Spanish.

BRETELLE

(Darkly)

I can understand enough to hate success. Is it fair that some walk in the sun while others walk in the shadow?

(Works rapidly)

POTTS

(Admiringly)

Lord, but you're light with your fingers, Frenchy. "Light fingered Frenchy!" Was that why you left the land of France?

FRANKLIN

BRETTELLE

(In more of a fury than the joke warrants)
What d'ye mean?

POTTS

Can't you take a jest?

BRETTELLE

But that depends on who makes it.

AUSTIN

Come, lads, don't quarrel. Where's my composing stick?

POTTS

Damnation! Look at this! A whole page ruined!

BRETTELLE

The ink is sticky, and the type too old!

POTTS

(Furious)

I wish it was in——

AUSTIN

Softly! Don't break it, or you'll have to set it fresh! Look, lad! See what I filched when the ale-wife's back was turned!

POTTS

(Overjoyed)

A flagon!

AUSTIN

Come, souse your sorrow! Souse your sorrow, man!

BRETELLE

(With delight)

It's my throat that's as parched as a desert. A health to you, Sam Austin!

AUSTIN

Nay, not to me! To our worthy master, Keimer! You first, Frenchy.

BRETELLE

Here's to old squeeze, Keimer. May a plague rot him!

(Drinks)

POTTS

Here's to our master, Keimer! May the devil make him work in hades as we've worked here on earth. Amen!

(Drinks)

AUSTIN

Here's to——

BRETELLE

Dieu! Here he comes! Pass me the ink balls.

(They hide the flagon, and work with furious industry. Enter Keimer, a tall pale man, with a red grayish-streaked beard, and hair that is tinged with gray. His clothes look as if they were flung on. He enters in silence, darts an instant glance at his printers, who work as if idleness were an unknown word. Then he crosses to left, takes off his great coat, hat and wig, and hangs them up, replacing them with a shabbier coat and a mangy wig. Then he crosses to the printers)

KEIMER

Papers ready yet?

POTTS

Not quite, sir. We're on the last printing.

KEIMER

How many more to do?

POTTS

About thirty, sir. We could work faster if——

KEIMER

If— Always excuses, nothing but excuses. You had better said the printing was not done because you are a set of lousy, idle wastrels.

(Enter left, Deborah Read. She is almost seventeen, of medium height, and with dark hair

and eyes. She is slender, with a windflower's beauty, and with a suggestion of a windflower's strength. Her manner is frank and charming, but without a trace of coquetry)

DEBORAH

Give you good day, Mr. Keimer!

(She pauses a second, smiling at him from the top of the steps, and then runs down into the room)

KEIMER

(With very evident pleasure)

Deborah Read! Why, you're a sight for sore eyes, surely.

DEBORAH

Thank you, Mr. Keimer.

(To the printers)

Give you good day, Mr. Journeymen. How is your wrist, Bretelle?

BRETELLE

Better, I thank you, Mademoiselle. Ever since you were here two weeks ago, I did what you told me about it.

DEBORAH

That's right. I'm glad it's better.

(Goes to counter)

Now, Mr. Keimer, you must let me help you fold the papers.

KEIMER

You'll soil your hands.

DEBORAH

As if I minded that!

(Printers work industriously all through the next scene)

KEIMER

(Watching her as she works)

I declare, you're wondrous pretty, Debby.

DEBORAH

(Briskly)

You mustn't flatter me.

KEIMER

If ever I'd had a daughter, I'd have wished for one like you.

DEBORAH

Ah, I'm afraid that you and Mrs. Keimer spoil me!

KEIMER

We couldn't do that, Debbie. You've got too sensible a head on your shoulders. You're as fine, and cool and sweet as a—as a morning glory. No wonder

half the lads have lost their hearts to you, and you not giving your heart to any. 'Tis foolish of you, Debbie, with your fine chances. How's Rogers, the potter?

DEBORAH

(Brushing the potter aside)

Oh, Rogers!

KEIMER

He's got a tidy fortune. And Matthew Denham, the butcher?

DEBORAH

His very soul is fat!

KEIMER

And Roger Francis, and Aaron Brown, and Folger Goldthwaite——

DEBORAH

(With a little gesture)

They're all so—commonplace!

KEIMER

Commonplace! Deborah, what do you be wanting? A lord?

DEBORAH

Oh, no. I'd never be so foolish.

KEIMER

What do you want then?

DEBORAH

Oh, I can't tell you. I'm not quite sure myself.
Only—

(Her eyes begin to dream)

he will be somehow different from the others, and high or low, rich or poor, I shall know him when he comes.

KEIMER

(Impatiently)

Prut! Nonsense! That's just maid's talk! A home and a husband will banish all such foolish dreaming! How's your father?

DEBORAH

In the best of health. He's going to call for us after supper!

KEIMER

Us?

DEBORAH

Ah, confess that you've forgotten that mother and I are to take supper with you and Mrs. Keimer! But I can't blame your memory when it's so weighted.

(Indicates papers)

KEIMER

(With pardonable pride)

We've seven hundred subscribers.

DEBORAH

(Impressed)

Gracious!

KEIMER

But you can't make much on a paper and a few books. If I could get some special work to do— If I could hang a sign outside my door, "Printer to Lord So and So." Ah, Debbie, that would be the making of me! But all the great folk send their work to London.

DEBORAH

(Regretfully)

I'm afraid they do.

KEIMER

So it's ridiculous to hope for.

DEBORAH

I wish it might come true. I do love this dear old shop, and the smell of the print and paper. Do you remember when you first brought me here?

KEIMER

(Holding his hand above the floor to the height of a small child)

You were about so high, and I held you up to see the printing press.

FRANKLIN

DEBORAH

And when I grew older you let me take my paints
and color the print blocks you made for children.

KEIMER

You were right skilful at it.

DEBORAH

Have you any now?

KEIMER

About a dozen.

DEBORAH

(Eagerly)

Will you let me color them?

KEIMER

Yes. But first I must let Mrs. Keimer see a little
more of you. And I haven't paid my duty to your
mother.

DEBORAH

(Leaving her work)

But afterwards?

KEIMER

Afterwards you may color all you wish.

*(As she turns to go Rogers enters. A common
looking man wearing his good clothes uneasily.)*

His face is mottled; his hands several sizes too large)

ROGERS

Good day to you, Mr. Keimer. And to you, Mistress Deborah.

(He looks at her anxiously)

You're not going?

DEBORAH

I've scarcely had a word with Mrs. Keimer, for I've just come.

KEIMER

Now, Debbie, stay a minute.

DEBORAH

Oh, thank you, Mr. Keimer. Really, I must not keep her waiting, Mr. Rogers.

(Curtsies primly and exits. Rogers looks glum)

KEIMER

You mustn't mind her. All girls are flighty till they have a husband to sober 'em. She'll smile on you yet.

ROGERS

You think so?

KEIMER

It's waiting as does it. Is there something you'll have?

ROGERS

An almanac.

KEIMER

(Giving it to him)

It prophesies fair and warmer.

ROGERS

Thank ye. And good day to you.

*(Exit Rogers. After a look at the printers
Keimer exits, left)*

POTTS

(With a laugh, as soon as their backs are turned)

It should have prophesied "storms and colder"! 'Tis the tenth almanac he's bought this month, and she won't look at him.

AUSTIN

(Dreamily)

It's just as Keimer said. She's like a morning glory. It seems as if she took the sunshine with her and left this old place dark.

BRETELLE

Spoke to me as if I were a human! "How's your wrist, Bretelle?" 'Twas worth the getting hurt.

POTTS

Let your feeling rest there. She's not for the like of us.

(*Begins to sing*)

"Since fortune's my foe,
To a desert I'll go——

(*As he sings the door in the background opens and young Benjamin Franklin enters. He is a boy of eighteen but looks several years older. He is pale, shabby, travel-stained. The most noticeable thing about his face is the directness and steadfastness of his eyes. He wears a coat two sizes too large for him, a garment evidently made over from a hand-me-down. As he takes off his hat on entering it is seen that he wears no wig. His hair falls lank on his coat collar. His low shoes are without buckles. His stockings are thick and clumsy looking. He carries a walking stick and on it a bundle tied up in a large handkerchief. From one of the pockets of his coat dangles a pair of stockings. The other pocket bulges with some unknown articles. Potts checks his song at sight of him*)

AUSTIN

Hey! What do you call that? A rag-bag or a scarecrow?

POTTS

(*Approaching Franklin*)

What might your name be?

FRANKLIN

FRANKLIN

My name is Benjamin Franklin.

(The printers stifle their mirth)

POTTS

Of the High Street Franklins?

FRANKLIN

No. I'm a stranger. I wish to speak with Mr. Samuel Keimer.

POTTS

(With an impudent swagger and a wink at the other printers)

And your business?

FRANKLIN

(Evenly)

Is none of yours.

AUSTIN

Zounds! The apparition hath found a tongue!

(They caper about. It is evident that the wine is having its effect on their spirits)

BRETTELLE

A chair for his Majesty!

(Pushes forward a three-legged stool)

AUSTIN

Back! Back! And mind your manners! Who are you to approach the King of the scarecrows?

(Franklin's eyes blaze. He takes a step forward)

BRETELLE

(As the printers skip back to the press)

But if you don't mind your manners, Messieurs, by the look in the scarecrow's eyes, you may be minding your pates.

POTTS

(Gingerly approaching Franklin)

Have you a card, sir?

AUSTIN

(Plucking Potts by the sleeve)

Don't embarrass him! 'Tis a deficiency that I can remedy. Give me a piece of paper.

(Writes)

Benjamin Franklin to see Mr. Keimer on important business. Where's your card tray?

BRETELLE

(Skipping up with the warming pan)

Here, Monsieur!

AUSTIN

(Dropping the paper in it with great elegance)

Now run and tell your master the King of all the scarecrows has come to Philadelphia on a secret errand.

(Bretelle runs nimbly with the warming pan and exits. Franklin has been standing with his face half turned from his tormentors, looking into the fire. Austin and Potts look at him from behind the printing press and keep up a running fire of talk)

Lord! What a chance to see the styles from court!

POTTS

The latest cut of hair. A great coat filled with stockings!

AUSTIN

And did you mark the bundle? The newest way for carrying one's finery.

(Enter Bretelle. He speaks with mock respect)

BRETELLE

Mr. Keimer will see you, sir, in a few minutes.

FRANKLIN

Thank you.

(Bretelle runs to the press and whispers to Potts, who is shaken with silent laughter)

POTTS

(Wiping his eyes on his printer's apron)
And we were dying for a little sport!
(Waves flagon in high glee)

"Since Fortune's my foe,
To a desert I'll go,
Where a river forever shall echo my woe."

BRETELLE

(His back to audience as he faces Franklin)

Hey! Rag and Tatter! Tell us how you like our singing?

(He does not see, until too late, Deborah Read, who stands in the doorway)

DEBORAH

(With the utmost indignation)

Pierre Bretelle!

BRETELLE

(Taken aback)

Why, Mademoiselle, I did not see—I—

(Mutters)

'Twas all in jest.

(Goes back to his work. Franklin looks up. His eyes and those of Deborah Read meet for a long moment)

DEBORAH

Was there some one you wished to see?

FRANKLIN

I asked to see Mr. Keimer, and he sent back word
I was to wait.

FRANKLIN

DEBORAH

I doubt if he knows you're here. I'll tell him.

FRANKLIN

I thank you.

(Exit Deborah)

POTTS

(Jeering)

Now what's to pay, Bretelle?

BRETELLE

Be still, you.

(Cuffs him. Enter Keimer)

KEIMER

I am Samuel Keimer. Did you wish to speak with me?

FRANKLIN

I did, sir.

KEIMER

(Crossing to printers, and swiftly inspecting work)

Are you near through?

BRETELLE

(As they work furiously)

Almost, Monsieur.

KEIMER

(Returning to Franklin)

Well?

FRANKLIN

I heard you might need a printer.

KEIMER

(Looking him up and down)

Where did you come from?

FRANKLIN

Boston.

KEIMER

(With half veiled contempt)

Why didn't you stay there?

FRANKLIN

Because there were too many printers there already, and not much chance of rising. I wanted to come to a new place where I could learn new methods and prove myself.

KEIMER

New methods? What d'ye mean?

FRANKLIN

(Untying bundle on counter)

I mean newer and better ways of printing, sir.

London is using Dutch letter, lately discovered, and we in America are behind the times. Here is some type of the new sort, and samples of what it will do, sir. I made it from a description. You see, the print is ten times clearer than what we're using now.

KEIMER

Moonshine and fiddle-faddle. Put them up.

(Franklin begins to tie up his bundle again)

I've no patience with new methods. My printing press is good enough as it stands. The best in Philadelphia.

FRANKLIN

I didn't mean it wasn't, sir. I only thought——

KEIMER

I do not pay my journeymen to think. I pay them to work.

FRANKLIN

I—I understand.

KEIMER

How long have you been a printer?

FRANKLIN

I've been apprenticed six years. I began work at thirteen, sir. I served my brother James, who prints the New England *Courant*.

KEIMER

A run away apprentice, I'll warrant. Was your brother the only one you ever worked for?

FRANKLIN

Yes, sir.

KEIMER

Well, you know what sort of a recommendation that gives you.

FRANKLIN

A little better than none at all, sir. But if you'll give me a trial I'll do my best.

(Keimer looks at him unmoved)

I can work hard, and fast.

KEIMER

Umph! That's what they all say. I've no mind to try a new man unless I must. It always means trouble and upset. But if Greenie doesn't come back I may be short. I'll give him one hour more. You can wait and see.

FRANKLIN

Thank you, sir.

KEIMER

Your pay will be seven shillings a week.

(To Bretelle)

Ready?

FRANKLIN

BRETTELLE

Yes, Monsieur.

(He has put on a hat and muffler, and shoulders a large package)

KEIMER

Then see your heels are not as slow as your fingers.
(Exit Bretelle. To Potts)

You take the next batch, Potts.

(To Austin)

Break up the type, and begin to set those handbills. Finish them within the quarter hour, and take them to their owners.

AUSTIN

Yes, Mr. Keimer.

(Exit Keimer)

Lord! I'll never have them done in that time!

FRANKLIN

Did you ever try heating the type?

AUSTIN

Heating the type? You'd better not play the wag with me, young journeyman.

POTTS

Try it, Austin. You can take it out on him later if it don't work.

AUSTIN

D'ye mean that?

POTTS

Surely.

AUSTIN

Well, then I'll try it.

(Sets up case by fire, with type)

POTTS

(Singing to himself as he slings papers on his back)

"Since fortune's my foe,

To a desert I'll go——

(Exit Potts)

AUSTIN

(At fire)

Lord! It works like a charm! It goes about twice as fast! Where did you learn it?

FRANKLIN

On winter mornings when my hands were freezing.

AUSTIN

(Regards him a minute, then crosses to him)

Harkye! That talk of ours about your being a rag-bag—you mustn't mind it. We're sometimes that way to a new one. Three years ago it was the same with me.

(Goes on with his work)

Did you land at Long Wharf?

FRANKLIN

(Helping to heat the type)

Yes.

AUSTIN

I landed there myself. Faith, I remember it as if 'twas yesterday! It happened that there were many great folk on board that day, and they got out first—velvet coats, curled wigs and flashing buckles. And last of all lands I, tattered at elbow, down at heel. And there was such a difference 'twixt what went first and what came last, that all the crowd that was watching us set up a laugh——

FRANKLIN

A laugh that seemed to *scorch* you——

AUSTIN

How did you know?

FRANKLIN

It was the same with me. And then they followed you, and mocked at you, and jeered you——

AUSTIN

(Ruefully)

Well I remember it!

FRANKLIN

And deep within you you swore that you would one

day land at that same wharf, and change those jeers to cheers!

AUSTIN

(Greatly startled, backs off)

Lord love us! He's crazed! I never thought no such a thing! You're jesting!

(Becomes less wary of Franklin)

Never let Keimer hear you at it. Keep mum when he's about.

(Lowering his voice)

I tell you this for your own good. He's the flintiest man in Philadelphia. He'll drive you as if he held a slave whip. He's a hard master!

FRANKLIN

But aren't all masters hard till you're your own?

AUSTIN

(Breaking away from him)

Till you're your own—! Well, you are crazed for sure. I'd best be off with these handbills before my own head grows maggots!

(He scurries to the door and exits. As soon as he has gone Franklin sits on the three-legged stool by fire, extracts a long roll of bread from his pocket, and begins to eat it. Deborah Read enters, left, a paint-box under her arm, and a bowl of water in her hand. She stops at sight of Franklin. He quickly puts the roll in his pocket)

DEBORAH

(Embarrassed)

You're the boy I saw this morning when I was sweeping off the steps. I—I laughed, and shook my broom at you. But 'twas not meant unkindly.

(Briskly)

Have you seen Mr. Keimer?

FRANKLIN

(Hastily hiding roll and rising)

Yes, Mistress, but he told me to wait.

(Hesitatingly)

Mistress, I want to thank you for taking my part——

DEBORAH

(Putting the paint-box on counter with bowl of water, taking out brushes)

I'm very angry with Pierre Bretelle.

FRANKLIN

(Bluntly)

Well, Mistress, 'twas no wonder they mocked. I do look like the scarecrow's cousin, and—and my coat is shabby.

DEBORAH

Their manners were shabbier than your coat. Are you a stranger to Philadelphia?

FRANKLIN

Yes, Mistress.

DEBORAH

I thought as much.

(She looks at him kindly as she leaves her paints and exits. The moment she is gone he snatches another mouthful. Enter Bretelle. He sees Franklin)

BRETELLE

(With a sneer)

Still there, M'sieu?

FRANKLIN

It would seem so.

BRETELLE

(As he hoists another load of papers to his back)

They have a saying in your country, "Beggars and slug-abeds love the fire."

(Exit Bretelle. Re-enter Deborah with a bowl of broth)

FRANKLIN

(Half ashamed, half grateful)

Mistress!

DEBORAH

(Very sweetly and graciously)

Nay, don't refuse me! 'Tis just a bowl of mutton broth to make you remember that Philadelphia is not always unkind and inhospitable to strangers.

FRANKLIN

FRANKLIN

(Embarrassed)

But, Mistress Read——

DEBORAH

(Surprised)

You know my name?

FRANKLIN

I heard one of the printers call you so.

(Haltingly, with emotion)

I scarce know how to thank you——

DEBORAH

(Moved)

Why, there are tears in your eyes!

(The next instant she is terribly confused, cannot look at him and wishes she had bitten her tongue off)

FRANKLIN

(Boyishly)

T-that's because the broth is very hot!

DEBORAH

(Regaining her composure, and setting to work)

Best let it cool, then.

(Franklin puts his bowl on hearth shelf, and taking a paper out of his pocket offers it to her)

FRANKLIN

If I am not presuming, would you care to see a Boston paper?

DEBORAH

(*Taking it up, interested*)

Why, 'tis the New England *Courant*!

FRANKLIN

(*Drinking broth and watching her*)

You've heard of it?

DEBORAH

My mother can't abide it; but my father dotes on it. I often read the articles aloud to him.

FRANKLIN

Which does he like the best?

DEBORAH

The articles signed "Couranto." He thinks they're wondrous clever.

FRANKLIN

(*Boyishly, eagerly*)

Does he? What do *you* think of them?

DEBORAH

Oh, sometimes I am moved and thrilled by them, and again I am half frightened.

FRANKLIN

Frightened?

DEBORAH

Some of the articles are so bold! Why, the last one said it didn't matter where a man started from, he could climb to any heights he chose. Do *you* believe that?

FRANKLIN

(Simply)

It's my creed. You see—I—I wrote those articles.

DEBORAH

You wrote those articles—! You're *Couranto*!

FRANKLIN

Well, my true name is Benjamin Franklin, but at heart I'm *Couranto*: only more so!

DEBORAH

You're going to be a printer here with Mr. Keimer?

FRANKLIN

I hope to be. I wish he were more interested in my new blocks for printing.

(Indicates them)

DEBORAH

Oh, father will be so excited when I tell him!

FRANKLIN

I'm very proud to think that he likes my articles.

DEBORAH

(With apparent pride)

And he's a judge of articles! He says that in order to reach the public the statements in a paper should be hot as rum punch and sudden as love! What do you think of that?

FRANKLIN

(Bluntly)

Well, I can speak for the first, but I've never experienced the second.

DEBORAH

(With innocent frankness)

No more have I. But then, we've years ahead of us before we can be as wise as father is.

FRANKLIN

That's true.

DEBORAH

I hope you don't mind my saying I thought your writing bold?

FRANKLIN

(Vehemently)

Were the press really free, my writing would have been a hundred times bolder. *Freedom!* That's go-

ing to be the watchword of this century. It's going to be a part of the doctrine that will shake the world.

DEBORAH

(Half startled)

Doctrine?

FRANKLIN

(With growing fervor)

That all men are born equal and free, and rise or fall by what is within themselves. That is the great discovery of our time. France dreams it: England dreads it: America *knows* it! The knowledge is running from country to country; but underground, like a subterranean fire, and the people who are living nearest the ground have word of it first. But our press dares not tell of it yet. 'Tis too mighty a conflagration. They are afraid of it. For when you've thrilled a man with the knowledge that he is responsible for his own future, what have you done? You've given him a spark of that Promethean fire that was meant to burn for all the world, and not for a favored few. However poor that man may be, however obscure he is, you've given him life and hope and strength——

DEBORAH

(Kindling)

You mean——

FRANKLIN

I mean that a man can fight his own way to any goal he dreams of. I mean that even a humble printing press can be—a ladder to the stars!

DEBORAH

(With a half cry)

Ah, I knew that you were different from the others. Tell me, what are you going to do?

FRANKLIN

(Eagerly and rapidly)

First—work early and late, and save till I have my own printing press.

DEBORAH

And later your own paper.

FRANKLIN

The Saturday Evening Post.

DEBORAH

(Staring before her)

The Saturday Evening Post.

(Turning to him enthusiastically)

That's a good title. It sounds as if folks would read it.

FRANKLIN

I think they will. And in it I mean to print my own wares as well as other people's.

DEBORAH

(Half overawed)

You mean to be an author?

FRANKLIN

Yes, yes, and more.

(Halts)

You'll think me mad!

DEBORAH

(Breathlessly)

No. No. Go on. Go on.

FRANKLIN

I hope to be what an author is when he helps to fashion the thoughts of the public.

DEBORAH

(Fascinated)

You mean a statesman?

FRANKLIN

(Passionately)

Yes. With all my heart and soul I long to serve America, my country, where a man can say, "I will mold my own future, and poverty is no disgrace"!

DEBORAH

Ah, and you'll do it!

FRANKLIN

You think I will?

DEBORAH

I'm sure of it!

FRANKLIN

You do believe in me!

DEBORAH

With all my heart! Oh, you have shown me vistas such as I never dreamed! You've made my little world seem small and sordid!

FRANKLIN

(Deeply)

No world that holds you in it could be sordid.

DEBORAH

Women can do so little.

FRANKLIN

An hour ago I might have said "That's true"! But now I know that no man's triumph is complete until he reads it in a woman's eyes.

GREENIE'S VOICE

(Shrilly, without)

Let be, I tell you!

(Enter Bretelle, and Greenie, a lad of fifteen or

*thereabouts, shock headed, wide mouthed.
Bretelle is leading him by the ear)*

BRETELLE

Come in, you whelp! Don't dictate to your elders!
(*Austin enters, followed by Potts*)

POTTS

What is it, Austin?

AUSTIN

'Tis our apprentice back again, and ready for a thrashing. Call Mr. Keimer.
(*Exit Potts, left*)

GREENIE

You leave me be, Pierre Bretelle! I tell you I missed the stage coach.

BRETELLE

(*Walking him over to the bench, right*)
A likely story!

GREENIE

And had to beg a ride!

AUSTIN

Wait till you've seen the master!

GREENIE

(Half-crying)

Wait till the master's heard the news I've got for him. Sir William Keith's coming here!

KEIMER

(At top of steps)

Who said Sir William Keith?

GREENIE

I did, sir. And it's the truth! Lash me if it isn't! I passed his coach just now and heard him say it. He was leaning out and talking to a friend.

KEIMER

Boy, if you're lying——

GREENIE

Don't I know I'll have to pay for it! But it's the truth, I tell you, the truth! I heard Sir William say so! He's coming here to ask about some printing.

KEIMER

(Entranced)

Angels in heaven! Sir William coming here! Clear up that bench, you vagabonds.

(Printers scurry to clear bench)

Debbie, be quick! Help me rid up this counter! Angels in heaven! A lord! A lord at last!

(Sees Franklin)

You! What are you waiting for? Don't you see the apprentice has come back?

FRANKLIN

But won't you need another printer?

KEIMER

(Shouting with vexation)

No! Get out! Get out! You're in the way. Get out——!

FRANKLIN

But, sir——

KEIMER

Begone, I tell you!

(Franklin turns away)

Is my wig straight?

(Keimer looks anxiously in mirror he takes from behind counter)

DEBORAH

(To Franklin)

Mr. Journeyman, come back a moment. Haven't you forgotten one of your print blocks?

(Just as Franklin turns back toward Deborah, Sir William Keith enters. Tall, slender, fashionable. His manner brings a whiff of the court into the dingy printing shop. He carries a folio under his arm)

KEITH

Is this the printing press of Samuel Keimer?

KEIMER

Yes, my Lord! Your Lordship's very humble servant!

KEITH

You sell both books and papers?

KEIMER

Yes, Sir William. Yes, my lord!

KEITH

I wish to have some cards printed for a dinner I am giving, instead of waiting to send the work to London.

KEIMER

Yes, my lord!

KEITH

Show me some samples of your work. I myself will supply the paper I wish them printed on.

KEIMER

(Hastening to get samples out from back of counter)

Yes, my lord. Here's one. You see the print is very clear and fine.

KEITH

(Looking at specimens)

Let others say that for you.

KEIMER

Y-yes, your lordship.

(Keith and Keimer are left of stage center, the rest in the room watching them eagerly. Austin stands at right in a respectful attitude, and takes the specimens which Keith discards)

KEITH

Too blurred. It will not do.

KEIMER

(Anxiously)

Try this, my lord.

(Gives him another specimen)

KEITH

(Discarding it)

Impossible. I am a judge of print and this is execrable. Have you no other specimens?

KEIMER

If your lordship could wait till I have some fresh type molded——

KEITH

I cannot wait that long.

(He hands back the last specimen to Keimer and

turns to go, coming face to face with Franklin)

FRANKLIN

(Offering a specimen)

Would your lordship look at this?

(Keith takes specimen; faces audience, tipping specimen to get light on it. Franklin draws nearer. Keith looks at specimen, then at Franklin, then looks at specimen again)

KEITH

Hah! Printed from Dutch letter. Clear. Perfect.

(To Keimer)

Why didn't you show me this?

(Looks again at specimen)

One of the Odes of Horace. Who made this type?

FRANKLIN

I did, my lord.

KEITH

H'm.

(Looks him up and down)

Are you one of Keimer's printers?

KEIMER

(Hastily)

Yes, my lord. I—I've just engaged him.

KEITH

(As Franklin begins to pass him other specimens)

Where did you learn to mold such type?

FRANKLIN

I read descriptions of what Caslon was doing in London, and what Didot was doing in France.

KEITH

(Looking at samples and back at Franklin)

You know the Odes of Horace, and the Essays of Shaftesbury? Where did you learn your A. B. C.'s? At Harvard?

FRANKLIN

No, my lord. Between whiles in my father's shop, and later in my brother's printing press.

KEITH

(Still looking at him)

What is your father?

FRANKLIN

A tallow chandler.

KEITH

(Considering)

Hah! Could you set up, print and correct for me a set of poems, and let me have them by tomorrow morning?

FRANKLIN

By working all night, yes, my lord.

KEITH

The pay shall be divided 'twixt you and Mr. Keimer. One-third to you; two-thirds for the use of the presses.

KEIMER

(Bowing, rubbing his hands with pleasure)
Yes, my lord.

KEITH

(To Franklin)

I leave the choice of type and spacing to yourself.

(Opens folio he carries, handing it to Franklin, and demonstrating on one of the pieces of white bristol board which it contains)

But I would have the poems printed thus: First the title of the poem, then underneath the title a line or two of the refrain, and then the poem itself, refrain and all. You understand me?

FRANKLIN

Perfectly, my lord.

KEITH

(Still regarding him as he takes a leisurely pinch of snuff)

And so you learned between whiles? You are ambitious?

FRANKLIN

KEIMER

(Quickly)

My lord, I'm sure he wouldn't be so presumptuous.

KEITH

(Still looking at Franklin, and ignoring Keimer's existence)

You are ambitious?

FRANKLIN

Yes, my lord.

KEITH

Take care. Ambition is a deadly drug. Yet here in America I sense a new order of things that is some day to be born—a new order with new opportunities. . . . You, young man, may go far. But never forget that though you satisfy all your ambitions, or nearly all, there may be one that you will never attain. And the failure to reach that one will leave your life bitter and incomplete. Some day you may remember that I have told you this.

FRANKLIN

My lord, I thank you.

KEITH

And one thing more. See that you get to London. Use newer methods yet, and you will win.

FRANKLIN

I thank your lordship.

(Keith turns toward door. General stir)

KEIMER

May I attend you, my lord?

(Runs before him to open door. Exeunt Keith and Keimer. Printers snatch up coats and hats from pegs, hurriedly putting them on)

POTTS

Work's over! Come, lads! This may be the only chance you'll ever have to let the whole street see you attending on a lord. Come! And then to the tavern!

BRETTELLE

The tavern!

AUSTIN

I wish 'twas not so dark, so folks could see us better.

(Exeunt Bretelle, Austin, Potts and Greenie with the utmost nimbleness)

FRANKLIN

(To Deborah)

My first step upward! I owe it all to you! You called me back—you pretended that I had left a print block——

DEBORAH

I felt it might be a critical moment if the great Sir William should take an interest in you. And it happened just as I hoped.

FRANKLIN

You made it possible.

DEBORAH

(Briskly, as if to ward off something that she feels)

Ah, but your own wit did the rest. Come! Every moment counts at a time like this. Get out the type case, and I'll read the poems. Which shall I choose?

FRANKLIN

(Preparing to set type with marvelous celerity)
The first that your hand touches.

DEBORAH

Shall I begin?

(She is looking at Franklin instead of at the paper)

FRANKLIN

The title first, he said. And after it the refrain.
What is the title?

DEBORAH

(Reading and then watching Franklin again)
'Tis called "*Lines to One Starting on a Long Journey.*"

FRANKLIN

And the refrain?

(*Deborah looks down on the paper. There is a slight pause*)

And the refrain?

DEBORAH

“Courage! Tho’ the way be far

Fate will guide you, like a star!”

(*Their eyes meet*)

FRANKLIN

Deborah, ’tis like a portent!

(*Eagerly*)

Ah, you must guess what I long to tell you——

DEBORAH

Hush! Not yet.

FRANKLIN

But—some day——

DEBORAH

Some day.

FRANKLIN

And you will listen?

DEBORAH

I will always listen when it is you that speak.

(*Enter Keimer in a high state of delight*)

KEIMER

Well! Well! This has been a great adventure! Not one of my neighbors but what knows that Samuel Keimer has entertained a lord in his shop. Come, Debbie. I'll warrant Mrs. Keimer and your mother will be agog when they hear it!

DEBORAH

(Gaily)

I'll warrant they will!

(She picks up paint-box)

KEIMER

(Opening door for her)

Come, Debbie.

DEBORAH

I'm coming.

(She pauses on the step leading to the house, looking back at the young figure who stands at the printing press, watching her)

Good night, Mr. Journeyman!

FRANKLIN

Good night to you, Mistress Read, and pleasant dreams.

DEBORAH

I thank you.

(Exit Deborah. Keimer, who has held a candle

for her, puts it back on the shelf, and pauses on step to admonish Franklin)

KEIMER

And don't forget, lord or no lord, night work or no night work, you'll be on hand come six tomorrow morning. Blow out the candles when you leave, and lock the door.

FRANKLIN

I will remember.

(Exit Keimer. Franklin stands at his printing press in the shadowy room, his face transfigured by an inner flame, his eyes lifted to the door through which Deborah has vanished)

"Courage, tho' the way be far!"

(He is beginning to work as falls the

CURTAIN

ACT II

Scene: Keimer's shop, as in Act I. Everything is much the same, only shabbier and more down at heel. The whole room has an air of non-success and forlornness. Across the wall at right, behind the printing press, hangs a tapestry made of sacking, rudely stitched together. The sacking is coarse brown stuff. To this tapestry are pinned wood cuts, prints and several pages from Keimer's paper, memorandums, etc. The "tapestry" parts in the middle, as if it were a curtain. But this parting is not wide enough to disclose anything that may be behind the "tapestry." It is Spring, and brilliant sunshine pours through the dilapidated windows. The door in background stands wide open. The hearth is fireless and gaunt.

Time: A year and a half later.

At Rise: Franklin stands at hearth, with a book propped in front of him on the hearthshelf. Quill pen and ink at his elbow. From time to time he writes on some loose pages. He is fathoms deep in what he is doing, and lost to all that goes on in the room. His clothing is clean, but a mass of patches. Since the weather is hot, he is without his coat and wears a loose linen shirt that has been often mended. The printers Austin and Bretelle have pulled the bench down stage, center, and straddling it, regale them-

selves with a meager lunch of water, bread and cheese. They too are even shabbier than in Act I. They wear loose shirts that are exceeding dirty, though Bretelle is a trifle cleaner than Austin. Their sleeves are rolled to their elbows. They eat dejectedly, even their sardonic spirits flown. Enter Potts from back-ground, mopping his face.

POTTS

Is there a bite and a sup for me, or have you rogues eaten it all?

BRETELLE

(As they make room for Potts)

Here's a bit of bread and cheese, and a sup o' water.

POTTS

Water, pah!

(He drinks, making a wry face)

AUSTIN

Don't curse your blessings. Next week you may feed on air.

BRETELLE

S-sh! Careful!

POTTS

Careful!

(Mimics Bretelle)

'Tis all over town that Keimer's gone bankrupt to

kiss the shoes of a lord! He's borrowed more money than he can ever pay back. He's beggared himself because Sir William looked on him. Dutch letter. Better ink and paper. All the rest of it.

(Indicates press)

And what's Sir William done? He's let us rot, damn him!

AUSTIN

Have a care!

POTTS

Oh, Ben won't hear me!

(Calls)

Ben! What did I tell you?

(Austin tiptoes up to Franklin, steals one of the pages Franklin is working on without Franklin's seeing him, and then skips back to printers with it)

AUSTIN

(Reading what is on sheet)

Air currents—atmosphere—effect of storms on the ether—

(Franklin begins to look for the sheet of paper)

Look! He can't find it. He doesn't guess it's been spirited away!

(Printers laugh in glee. Franklin gives up his search for the paper and goes on with his work. Potts goes up to Franklin and slaps him resoundingly on the shoulder)

POTTS

Hey, Franklin!

(Franklin looks up)

What romance is it that's stuffing your eyes and ears?

(Looks at Franklin's book)

A book on chemistry.

(Snatches it from Franklin)

FRANKLIN

(Catching Potts)

Don't touch that book, Potts.

POTTS

(Writhing)

Let me go! I tell you, you're breaking my arm!

Let me go!

(Franklin drops Potts' arm and retains book)

You'd think your foolish book was bound in gold!

(Potts rubs his arm)

FRANKLIN

I'd rather lose my head than that book. It is bound in gold for them that have eyes to see! It's a guide to heights that—

(Abruptly, as if remembering suddenly to whom he speaks)

that are no more to you than cold soup in yesterday's dish.

(Goes back to his work)

AUSTIN

I'd be glad for soup in any dish, today's or yesterday's!

POTTS

That book was a gift from Sir William to our worshipful friend. I saw his name on the fly leaf.

AUSTIN

To our moon-struck friend! Have you not noticed his actions these last few weeks? Yesterday I saw him working on a kite, and the day before that he was tying silk cord to a hempen string.

BRETLE

What's this he's dropped?

(Shows metal disk)

POTTS

A piece of iron! What d'ye suppose he wants it for?

AUSTIN

Keep it and see.

POTTS

I'll throw it on the scrap heap.

BRETLE

Nay, give it to me. There's nothing I wouldn't do to spoil his crack-brained plans.

POTTS

Hey, Frenchy! You hate him because Deborah
Read smiles on him, and you want Deborah!

*(Bretelle's eyes flash fury. He clenches and un-
clenches his hands)*

BRETELLE

(Fairly spitting out the words)

You blackguards!

AUSTIN

Lord, Frenchy! What a demon looks out of your
eyes when you are angry.

(Backs off)

BRETELLE

She's kind to all of us.

POTTS

(Enjoying Bretelle's anger)

Aye, but most kind to him.

BRETELLE

You know she's Keimer's ward. He wouldn't let
Ben marry her.

AUSTIN

And there's Rogers to reckon with. He hangs
round this door sill every day, just for a glimpse of
her.

BRETELLE

I'd see Ben rot in hell before he gets her.

POTTS

(*Lightly*)

We'll rot there ourselves if Keimer finds us idle.
Is this the ink we're to use?

(*Goes back to presses. Bretelle puts iron disk in his pocket. Franklin comes back from the door and takes up his book. A woman comes to the doorway, background. She is of medium height, and may once have been pretty. But now she looks work-worn, ragged, and old before her time. She wears a dilapidated gray dress and shawl, and carries a leather portmanteau. In spite of her apparel she has an air of determination. She glances up and down the road, and then enters Keimer's shop*)

WOMAN

Can you tell me the way to the magistrate's?

POTTS

He has no traffic with beggars.

AUSTIN

And the poorhouse is in the other direction.

(*Franklin comes out of his dream, is aware that something is afoot, and looks at the woman*)

FRANKLIN

What is it you are wanting, Mistress?

WOMAN

Can you tell me the way to the magistrate's?

FRANKLIN

(Going to the door and pointing up the road)

The large house at the end of this street, Mistress.
A white mansion with green shutters.

WOMAN

I landed this morning with a letter to 'im. Do you think 'e'll see me?

FRANKLIN

I'm sure he will if you bide your time, Mistress.
Best go to his house and wait.

WOMAN

Thank you, sir. Thank you kindly, sir.

(Exit woman, background. Franklin goes back to his book)

AUSTIN

Spoke to her as if she was a lady!

POTTS

He's losing his wits. For a while even I believed in him. But now I know he's a stupid dreamer.

*(From time to time during the talk that ensues
Franklin goes to the open door and looks up
at the sky)*

AUSTIN

Look at him! Star gazing in the day time! He doesn't hear a word we say! Do you truly think he's crazed, Potts?

POTTS

I wonder why Keimer keeps him on?

BRETELLE

Do you need to ask? 'Tis for fear of offending my lord.

AUSTIN

*(Tauntingly to Franklin, who stands at doorway,
looking upward)*

Hey, Ben! Ben Franklin, what do you see in the heavens?

FRANKLIN

(Dreamily, in a tranced voice)

"For the third week of April great heat may be expected. Look out for storms. Thunder and lightning."

AUSTIN

(Fairly shouting at him)

Ben!

FRANKLIN

(Turning and looking at them vaguely)

Did some one speak to me?

POTTS

What did I tell you?

(Taps his head)

'Tis here that he's affected. Can't keep his mind off the almanac and the weather.

FRANKLIN

Did you speak to me, Potts?

POTTS

(Suddenly blazing out at him)

Yes, I spoke to you, you half-crazed dreamer. What has your great friend done for us? Why hasn't he sent us patrons? Why hasn't he got us customers? Look at that new Dutch letter press——

FRANKLIN

Sir William didn't command Mr. Keimer to buy new presses.

AUSTIN

What's he done for us?

BRETTELLE

Where's the subscribers he should send to us?

FRANKLIN

FRANKLIN

New presses aren't enough. You've got to have brains behind the presses if you want subscribers.

POTTS

(Mimicking)

Brains! Didn't I tell you he was simple?

(Franklin goes back to his book)

AUSTIN

When he first came here he did two men's work for one man's pay. That's always a sure sign.

POTTS

Let's bait him!

(Dances up to Franklin, and thrusting aside Franklin's book, looks impudently into Franklin's face)

Aha! Ben Franklin! What were you doing last night in Peter Folger's field? You were running up and down with the wind in your hair as if the devil was after you!

(Enter Keimer left, in time to hear Potts' last words. Keimer is wearing his shabby best. He carries a paper in his hand)

KEIMER

(Loudly and furiously)

And well he may be, you skulking villains.

(He catches Potts by the scruff of the neck and swings him round)

Who set the third page of last week's paper?

(Silence)

Who read the proof?

BRETELLE

Not I, M'sieu!

KEIMER

(Roaring)

Answer me! Who mixed the town news with the almanac predictions?

POTTS

It must be Ben. He's talked of nothing but the weather.

KEIMER

(Shaking the paper under Franklin's nose)

Ben Franklin, answer me! Did you set this column?

FRANKLIN

Why, yes, sir—I——

KEIMER

(In a towering rage)

Aha! You loose-tongued rascal! I thought that it was you! Where were your wits? What were you thinking of? You'll be the ruin of me!

(Printers make signs of delight to each other)

AUSTIN

Is it so terrible, sir?

KEIMER

Terrible! It's brought the best folk of the town about my ears!

(To Franklin)

Didn't I tell you to put the almanac predictions at the top of the page?

FRANKLIN

(Eagerly)

That's where I put them, sir.

(Deborah enters, left, and stands on steps, listening)

For the third week of April great heat may be expected. Look out for storms. Thunder and lightning.

KEIMER

I'll thunder and lightning you! Look what you've done, you scurvy rascal!

(The printers gather about Franklin and Keimer in high glee. Keimer reads in a voice broken with emotion)

Our esteemed citizen Darius Flint is dead and gone to his reward. Great heat may be expected. What were you dreaming of? And as if that wasn't enough, look at this! Miss Mabelle Snipper hath married Thaddeus Brown. Look out for storms!

(Printers can barely stifle their mirth. Keimer glares at them)

Be silent! This is no time for laughter.

(Tragically)

Look at the last one! Twin babes have come to bless the home of Mistress Seymour. They will be christened on the Sabbath. Thunder and Lightning.

FRANKLIN

I'm truly sorry, sir.

KEIMER

Sorry won't mend it. You'll leave my shop. I'll not be served by a half-witted lout who——

(Sound of coach wheels without)

Isn't that the sound of coach wheels? Is that his lordship?

(A coach passes and some one within it bows to Keimer)

My lord! Your lordship's very humble servant!

(Keimer bows rapturously again and again)

What a bow he gave me! There's not a tradesman in Philadelphia that has the friends that I have.

(He comes back into the room mollified and smiling)

Get to your work, you rogues.

(To Franklin)

And you, if there's another such happening as this you quit my roof! Understand?

(He turns to Deborah)

'Tis lucky I wore my best! One never knows who may be passing. Fetch me a mirror, Deborah.

*(Deborah brings one from behind the counter.
Austin, Potts and Bretelle exeunt background
with papers)*

DEBORAH

Here it is, Mr. Keimer. You're all dressed up.

KEIMER

You think I look well, Debbie?

DEBORAH

Splendid.

KEIMER

Then maybe I'll get what I'm after.

DEBORAH

I hope so, whatever it is.

KEIMER

Tend shop while I'm out and see that no customers escape you. Ther're so few coming we can't afford to lose 'em.

DEBORAH

Of course we can't. I'll do my best, Mr. Keimer.

KEIMER

Just kind of smile and make 'em buy, eh?

DEBORAH

I'll try to.

KEIMER

(To Franklin)

Print the bills for the India Company, and take them to their owners.

(Exit Keimer, background. Deborah comes down to bench. The shabby black mourning she is wearing makes her look somewhat pale and forlorn)

DEBORAH

(As Franklin comes to bench)

Dear blunderer! I know you didn't mean to make that terrible mistake. Why, all these weeks you haven't been yourself. You've been living in a dream. You hardly hear me when I speak to you.

FRANKLIN

I was a thousand miles away when I set that type. I never thought of Keimer and his printing press. If you knew what I'm trying to do——

(Stares before him at something she does not see)

DEBORAH

Is it some new world you want to conquer, Ben?

FRANKLIN

Yes. A new world. One that in a hundred years will make this old world over.

DEBORAH

Isn't this old world hard enough?

FRANKLIN

So hard I want to make it easier. It's a new discovery I aim at, the like of which we've never dreamed. For weeks I've thought of nothing else, I've dreamed of nothing else. I've worked in secret.

(Indicates)

My tools are there, behind that sacking.

DEBORAH

(Bewildered)

Your tools——

FRANKLIN

You are the only one I can talk to. No one else would believe me.

DEBORAH

But what is this thing that you want to discover?

FRANKLIN

It's a wonderful and terrible force, and I want to find the way to transmute it.

DEBORAH

(Puzzled)

And where can it be found?

FRANKLIN

It's in the greatest and humblest manifestations of nature. It's in the lightning in the summer, and in a cat's fur when you stroke it in the winter.

DEBORAH

In the lightning in the summer, and in a cat's fur in the winter—— Oh, my poor Ben! You've been studying too hard! You're feverish!

FRANKLIN

I've thought of a way to transmute it. It's so simple that no one has ever dreamed of doing it, and so big with possibilities that I can't see them all——
(*Stares before him*)

DEBORAH

Have you been out in the sun without your hat? Ah, you won't listen to my warnings, and even your brains can't stand such heat!

FRANKLIN

My new discovery may light our streets with a light brighter than torchlight.

DEBORAH

But, Ben——

FRANKLIN

It may run our carriages without horses.

FRANKLIN

DEBORAH

Run our carriages without horses—oh, you're getting worse!

FRANKLIN

(Obsessed by what he sees in his mind's eye)

It may even turn the wheels of trade without man's help.

DEBORAH

(Starting away from him)

Ben! You're talking witchcraft!

FRANKLIN

I believe I've found a way to transmute this power if I can make a piece of metal float in the air.

DEBORAH

A piece of metal float in the air! Oh, don't be angry with me, but was there ever insanity in your family?

FRANKLIN

And then if a storm would come! The almanac prophesies it.

DEBORAH

W-what has a storm to do with it?

FRANKLIN

Everything. It's only in a storm that I can prove it.

DEBORAH

No! This is not witchcraft! This is lunacy!

(Coming to him)

'Tis your poor wits! But you can trust me. I'll shelter you and shield you. I won't let any one know.

FRANKLIN

(With intensity)

It's such anxious waiting! Oh, if a storm would only come!

(Rises impatiently and begins to walk up and down)

DEBORAH

Ben, dear, rouse yourself. Try to shake off this thing that's besetting you.

FRANKLIN

What are jeers and scorn, or fatigue and hunger when I have a hope like this shining before me. To discover what no one else has discovered! To dare what no one else has dared!

DEBORAH

(In despair)

It's no use! He doesn't even hear me. There's nothing I can do.

FRANKLIN

I told you a printing press might be a ladder to

the stars. What if I could reach out and touch the stars themselves? I'm on the edge of a discovery that transcends everything I've ever hoped, a discovery that will serve man to the end of time. It's like an omen for the future. I'm staking everything on it. Who knows! If I can succeed in this I can succeed in all the rest. There's nothing that I will be afraid to attempt! But if I fail in this——

DEBORAH

I will be here to comfort you, my poor demented lover!

FRANKLIN

If I can prove this dream of mine a fact there's nothing in my future that I fear to ask you to share. If this comes true——

(Enter Rogers, background)

ROGERS

Give you good day, Mistress Deborah.

DEBORAH

Oh, Mr. Rogers. Good day.

ROGERS

(Eyeing Franklin, coldly)

Mr. Keimer's apprentices seem to have as much time as their master.

FRANKLIN

(Suddenly remembering)

I clean forgot the bills for the East India Company!
Keimer'll be back before they are delivered!

(He runs to press, and begins to tie up bills)

ROGERS

I met Mr. Keimer. He bid me wait.

DEBORAH

Wait in the house, then. 'Tis far more comfortable.

ROGERS

(Frowning)

I will wait here.

DEBORAH

(Taking up her work with an air of detachment)

As you please, Mr. Rogers.

(Exit Franklin, background with bills)

ROGERS

(Menacing)

I'm not a fool. I see which way the wind is blowing. I knew what I should find if I came here to-day, and I'm prepared for it.

DEBORAH

(Letting fall her work)

What do you mean?

ROGERS

Your guardian may be blind, but I see which way the wind is blowing. You're giving your favors to a cracked-brain prentice.

DEBORAH

(Indignant)

Mr. Rogers!

ROGERS

You've let this scullion printer turn your head. A beggarly young whelp from nobody knows where!

DEBORAH

From every one knows where. Ben Franklin is as open as the day. Every one knows his history, and where he came from. Which is more than folk can say of you.

ROGERS

(Furious)

Who's been talking to you?

DEBORAH

No one.

ROGERS

(Taking another tack)

Wait till Mr. Keimer hears of your fine love romance.

DEBORAH

(Proudly)

I've never tried to hide it. 'Tis nothing to be ashamed of. I am proud of it.

ROGERS

Are you such a fool as to waste your heart on a beggar when a man of substance wants you?

DEBORAH

Mr. Rogers! Please! I'm tending shop for Mr. Keimer, and I don't wish to be forced to leave.

ROGERS

You will be forced to leave if the times don't mend. 'Tis not five months since your people died of the fever, and now your guardian's losing money every day. What will become of you?

DEBORAH

(With dignity)

Mr. Rogers, Mr. Keimer is my guardian, and though my parents died without leaving me money, I feel that my services to Mr. and Mrs. Keimer give me a right to a place in their household.

ROGERS

You should have a household of your own. I've money enough to buy and sell half the petty merchants

of this town. Hang it, Deborah! I'm not bad looking, and I haven't got the plague.

(He comes close to her)

DEBORAH

Mr. Rogers——

ROGERS

You know your people wanted you to marry me. They liked me as much as they hated Franklin. You're wasting your heart on a brain-sick fool while a real man wants you, and I'm going to have you!

(He crushes her to him, kissing her. Keimer enters from background as she wrenches herself free)

DEBORAH

(Breathlessly indignant)

Mr. Keimer!

KEIMER

Well, Debbie, what's so terrible about a kiss? Don't be a prude, girl. Go and tell Mrs. Keimer I'll be with her presently.

(Exit Deborah, left)

ROGERS

How are things going, Keimer?

KEIMER

(With an effort at bravado)

How should they go?

ROGERS

There are only two reasons for a man's wearing his sabbath clothes on a week day. Either he's making money, or he's trying to get a loan, and by the sight of your face when you came in, you didn't get the loan.

KEIMER

A man who has a lord for his patron can look as he pleases.

ROGERS

A lord for his patron—then you haven't heard the news?

KEIMER

News?

ROGERS

Sir William's stolen a march on the good folk of Philadelphia. He sailed for London this morning.

KEIMER

Sir William sailed? You're trying to frighten me. It isn't true.

ROGERS

It is true, Keimer. He passed in his coach not half an hour ago. Ask the wharf master if you doubt me. I saw him sail.

KEIMER

Why, this means—this means—ruin!

ROGERS

Keimer, if I were to give you fifty pounds, give, not lend it to you, would it help you?

KEIMER

(Fiercely)

What do you mean?

ROGERS

Would it help you?

KEIMER

(Almost beside himself)

It would save me—it would——

ROGERS

The money is yours on one condition.

KEIMER

(Joyfully)

Name it!

ROGERS

I marry Deborah to-day.

KEIMER

You what?

ROGERS

I marry Deborah to-day.

KEIMER

Too quick. It can't be managed like that. Give me ten days, a week. Good Lord, man, what's your haste?

(Outside the sky has become gradually overcast and the wind is rising. As the scene proceeds rain begins to fall, and it grows darker and darker. Keimer and Rogers are too absorbed to notice it)

ROGERS

To-day. Before you have a scandal on your hands.

KEIMER

A scandal!

ROGERS

If you hadn't been so blind—always thinking of your patron—you would have seen that Deborah is head over heels in love with that cracked-brained journeyman of yours, Ben Franklin.

(Keimer starts)

To-morrow or the next day she may be off with him.

KEIMER

Impossible!

ROGERS

Do you want her to marry a madman?

KEIMER

Mad? How can you prove him mad?

ROGERS

Last night with these very eyes didn't I see him running up and down in Peter Folger's field when there was nothing to run for?

KEIMER

That isn't proof enough. No. No. I tell you I won't risk it.

ROGERS

It can, and shall be done. I've fetched Mallory.

KEIMER

What?

ROGERS

Aye, Mallory, the winking parson. He's in there now with Mrs. Keimer. He's winked at fifty just such marriages as this and no harm done.

KEIMER

What if Deborah refuses to say her lines?

ROGERS

You and Mrs. Rogers are the two witnesses who'll swear you heard her say them.

KEIMER

No!

ROGERS

Do you want your shop sold over your head? Do you want Mrs. Keimer on the streets and yourself in a debtor's prison? Do you want to fail when the money is here before your eyes?

(Takes out a dust-colored bag with sovereigns in it)

KEIMER

It's not enough to say that he is crazed. I must be able to give some proof of it, a proof that every one sees——

ROGERS

Fifty pounds, Keimer. You won't get such an offer again.

KEIMER

(Torn)

I tell you I——

POTTS

(Rushing in through door, background)

Come, lads! Into the ark with you! 'Tis Noah's flood that loosed!

(Bretelle and Austin run in, dripping)

FRANKLIN

AUSTIN

Lord! What a downpour!

(A flash of lightning and a crash of thunder)

POTTS

Harken to that!

(They close the door in background. Austin at window)

The rain is less but the wind is more! Whoop!
That was blast!

BRETTELLE

(To Keimer)

'Tis a very hurricane, M'sieu!

(Printers run back to their work. At this point the door is burst open from without and Franklin dashes in, sopping wet, and in a high state of excitement)

FRANKLIN

A storm! A storm at last! Out of my way, Bretelle!

(Pushes Bretelle aside)

Can't you let me pass, Potts!

(Whirls Potts out of his way)

I want my kite!

(Snatches kite from behind sacking. Runs hand into pocket)

But where's my piece of metal?

(Looks madly about him)

Where's my piece of iron?

POTTS

Well, he is crazed for certain!

FRANKLIN

(Looking about him frantically)

A piece of metal! I've got the silk cord and the hempen string. But I can't find a piece of iron.

(Sees huge key in door and wrenches it out of the lock before any one can stop him)

The key!

(Holds it up, exultantly)

The iron key! I'll fasten it on my kite!

(He dashes out the door. There is a flash of lightning that shows him in silhouette running with his kite)

ROGERS

What did I tell you, Keimer? Doesn't this prove him crazed?

KEIMER

(With conviction)

You're right. He should be in a madhouse.

ROGERS

(Significantly)

Then what we spoke of is a bargain?

KEIMER

Yes. I'll do my part if you'll do yours.

ROGERS

I'll do it fast enough.

(Gives him money)

Here's what I promised you.

(Enter Deborah, left. Stands at the top of the steps)

DEBORAH

Mr. Keimer. Come quickly. Mrs. Keimer's so afraid of the lightning that even Parson Mallory can't quiet her.

KEIMER

I'm coming, Debbie. Go in. Go in.

(Exit Deborah)

ROGERS

It couldn't happen better. 'Twill take but a few moments. Come, man! Remember it's to save your ward from her own folly. Come! It must be here and now, or not at all.

KEIMER

Aye, that it must.

(Waves him to steps)

After you, Mr. Rogers.

ROGERS

(Bowing clumsily)

Nay, after you, Mr. Keimer.

(They exeunt, left. Bretelle stares after them)

BRETTELLE

(Frowning)

What's afoot? If I could put two and two together—I know some mischief is afoot. Why should Rogers give money to Keimer when Keimer's bankrupt?

POTTS

Lord knows!

(He is not interested)

BRETTELLE

"It must be here and now, or not at all." What does it mean?

AUSTIN

I can't tell you, Frenchy. I wish we had a glimmer o' fire. I'm wet to the skin.

BRETTELLE

And Parson Mallory, the winking parson, he never comes here. But now—! Mon Dieu! Lads, I have it! I know why Rogers has given Keimer money. Rogers wants Deborah! She's being married to him by the winking parson whether she will or not! I'm sure of it!

AUSTIN

'Tis none of our concern.

BRETTELLE

(Fiercely)

Aye, but it's mine. I'm off to fetch the magistrate.

FRANKLIN

POTTS

Not in this storm!

(He catches Bretelle by the sleeve)

BRETELLE

Through a hundred storms!

(Bretelle wrenches himself free and dashes out)

POTTS

Lord love us! He's as crazy as Franklin!

(Deborah flings open the door at left, and appears on steps)

DEBORAH

(Imploring)

Ben! Ben!

(Rogers follows her and seizes her wrists)

ROGERS

Come on, my dear, or shall I have to carry you?

DEBORAH

Let go my hands. Don't dare to touch me.

(She twists her wrists out of his grasp and runs down steps)

ROGERS

That's no way for a bride to talk to her husband.

DEBORAH

(Defiantly)

You're not my husband and swearing that I've said my lines won't make it true.

(Keimer enters left)

ROGERS

Oh, yes, it will, my dear. If folks don't think it's legal they've only to ask your guardian and your guardian's wife.

DEBORAH

(With spirit)

Not if I publish from the housetops what you've both done. You will be jailed for perjury.

ROGERS

Who will believe your word against your guardians?

(The truth of this sweeps over Deborah. She winces as if she had been struck)

DEBORAH

Oh!

(Catches her breath)

You're all in league against me! But Ben will help me. He won't see this happen. Oh, Ben! Ben!

KEIMER

(Sneering)

Aye, call on Ben, and see if a madman can aid you!

ROGERS

You come with me. I'll teach you a wife's duty to her husband.

(As Rogers starts toward Deborah, Franklin rushes in from background. He is in an exalted state of joy and excitement. From now on his dreamy manner is entirely gone. He feels himself master of himself and his destiny. He stands in the doorway drenched with rain, his kite trailing on his arm, his face uplifted and glorified. Outside only sheet lightning is now playing as a background of darkness shot with pale flame)

DEBORAH

Oh, Ben!

FRANKLIN

Deborah, it's true! All that I hoped! All that I dreamed! My discovery's a fact. We can transmute electricity! We can bring the lightning to earth and make it the servant of man! Out in that storm with my kite and my key I've learned a wonderful secret, a secret that will revolutionize science. The key was all blue flame! The shock of the current ran down my arm and burned my hand! Look! It's a mark set by one of the greatest forces of the universe! What has been done this hour will last till the world is dust! It will work miracle after miracle! Don't you see what this means for me! I can make all the rest come true! I can ask you to share my future!

(In the midst of his joy and excitement he becomes aware of a chilly silence on the part of those in the room with him. Deborah looks toward him tremulously, but says nothing. Franklin checks his torrent of words and takes a step toward Deborah. Rogers starts forward to intercept him)

Deborah, don't you care?

ROGERS

Stand away from my wife, you wastrel!

FRANKLIN

Your wife! What folly is this you're speaking?

ROGERS

My wife. Married to me as fast as bell and book can make it!

DEBORAH

It's not true. They couldn't force me to say my lines.

KEIMER

Be silent. If you don't hold your tongue I'll tell why you were forced to marry Rogers.

FRANKLIN

(Outraged, stepping toward him, hands clenched)
You—carrion.

DEBORAH

(Imploring)

Ben! You'll be jailed if you strike your master.
Remember that I need you.

FRANKLIN

(To Keimer, struggling for self-control)

If it wasn't for that need I'd break every lying bone
in your body, though I swung for it the next day.

ROGERS

Come, Deborah. 'Tis time we were setting out.
(Deborah shrinks)

FRANKLIN

No. She stays here. Don't be afraid of him,
Deborah.

ROGERS

Who are you to come between man and wife?

FRANKLIN

Ben Franklin, printer, at your service.

(Places himself in front of door, background)

If you try to cross this threshold with Deborah you'll
find me ready.

ROGERS

(Sneering)

Quakers don't fight.

FRANKLIN

This Quaker does.

POTTS

He's got a grip like iron, Mr. Rogers. Don't go near him.

(Enter Bretelle with woman from background)

BRETELLE

Make way here! Make way! There's some one would speak with Mr. Rogers.

(To Deborah)

I won't see you come to sorrow, Mistress Deborah. I've been to the magistrate's.

(Rogers turns, looks at woman, is startled and then comes to himself)

ROGERS

I've nothing to give to beggars.

(The woman still stands looking at him)

Be off.

(She makes no move to go)

Why do you stand here?

WOMAN

(Slowly and distinctly)

You know why.

ROGERS

Be off, I tell you.

WOMAN

Not unless you go with me. You broke one woman's 'eart, and now you're trying to break another. I've crossed the seas to find you. It's not your fault I'm not dead by now.

KEIMER

Get out of here. March!

WOMAN

I'm that man's wife and 'e knows it.

ROGERS

You lie!

WOMAN

I knew you'd say that.

BRETELLE

It's the truth she's speaking. She's laid her proofs and letters before the magistrate.

FRANKLIN

(His hand on Bretelle's shoulder)

How shall we ever thank you for this, Bretelle!

WOMAN

I want justice.

FRANKLIN TOI

FRANKLIN

And you shall have it. (*To Rogers*) You should be jailed for this, you scoundrel.

WOMAN

Do you 'ear what 'e says?

ROGERS

Wrong for once, you damned meddler! You'd have me up for bigamy? Well, ask the girl herself. She'll tell you she never said her lines.

MRS. ROGERS

Is this true?

DEBORAH

Every word of it.

MRS. ROGERS

Then you're a free woman this hour, and you may thank God for it. What's took from you is not worth the keeping. But I'll 'ave my rights whatever 'appens. I'll show the world I'm an honest woman, and lawful wed.

(*To Rogers*)

Will you come with me quiet or shall I tell the magistrate that you're——

ROGERS

I'll come with you quiet, you damned, sneaking jade. And I'll pay you for this later.

FRANKLIN

She came in the back door to get you. Now let her go out the front door as an honest woman should.

(Rogers and Mrs. Rogers exeunt left. Franklin turns to Keimer)

And as for you, you sordid perjurer, do you know what it means to force a marriage under the laws of Philadelphia?

KEIMER

(Keeping behind counter)

And do you know what it means to take the key of a man's house? 'Tis a prison offense. You that prate of law remember that I can have the law on you.

FRANKLIN

(With power)

I took a key. You tried to take a woman's reputation. Because she was poor you sold her. Because she was helpless you tried to smirch her, you——

KEIMER

Leave my house!

FRANKLIN

Deborah, come. We'll find another parson and be truly married.

KEIMER

Without the consent of her guardian, the marriage will be illegal.

FRANKLIN

Deborah, no matter what the law can do, no matter what people say, will you come to me?

DEBORAH

No matter what the law can do, no matter what people say, I—come to you.

FRANKLIN

(Tenderly looking down at her)

And you don't think me a madman?

DEBORAH

I don't know. I don't care. I only know—with you—I'm not afraid.

(As they step out the door where the rain has ceased, a rainbow, like an omen of hope glows across the sky)

CURTAIN

ACT III

Scene: Franklin's home in Philadelphia twenty years later.

A Colonial room, white woodwork. Gray walls. Two French windows in background, opening on iron balconies. On each side of these windows draperies of Italian blue cotton poplin. The few pieces of furniture which the room contains are mahogany, with here and there a touch of the same blue repeated in a cushion.

Glass candlesticks on hearth shelf. Between them a blue-toned picture. The whole room is stamped with an air of frugality and simplicity.

Blue bell ropes at right and left. Also at right and left, toward background, doors giving into other rooms of the house.

A fire burns in the hearth at left.

In the center of the room a stout table with Leyden jars beneath it, and an electrical apparatus on top of the table that can easily be concealed by books and papers.

Four members of the Philadelphia Assembly, Mr. Knox, Mr. Andrews, Mr. Braithwaite, and Mr. Murray are seated about the table. Dr. Franklin, now a middle-aged man, yet with vitality and genius in his aspect, sits at the table, back, center. There is a hubbub of voices as the curtain rises. "Give me the list."

"You've read the new amendment?" etc., etc. Dr. Franklin rises.

FRANKLIN

Gentlemen, I think that this is all we have time for. Our recess is nearly over. They'll be expecting us at the Assembly.

ANDREWS

(As men gather up their papers previous to departure)

And wishing they could hang us.

FRANKLIN

You must take that as a compliment to our sagacity. The members of the King's party realize that we will move heaven and earth to have Galloway chosen as our agent. Everything depends on sending a patriot to petition the King of England.

MURRAY

Dr. Franklin——

FRANKLIN

(Sweeping on)

He must plead the urgency of our cause. Pitt, Fox, Burke—great leaders of England, favor us. But the king hates us, and those who wish to stand well with him hate us also. Always we must bear in mind that the king is not an Englishman. He is from Hanover. Remember that.

KNOX

Sir——

BRAITHWAITE

Dr. Franklin——

FRANKLIN

Mr. Knox.

KNOX

I'd follow you blindfold through hell, but I must say, sir, that I consider it a hazardous thing for a small nation to shake its fist in the face of a big nation.

FRANKLIN

Do you read the Scriptures, Mr. Knox?

KNOX

I do, sir.

FRANKLIN

Then you must know the chapter where David put out Goliath's eye.

(The men approach Franklin separately as they leave)

MURRAY

We'll fight for Galloway to the last ditch, sir.

FRANKLIN

I hope you will. I know you will.

(Murray and Knox move to door R.)

BRAITHWAITE

You're coming, Dr. Franklin?

FRANKLIN

A little later, Mr. Braithwaite.

BRAITHWAITE

I wish you were on the Committee, sir.

FRANKLIN

My opponents have tied my hands by keeping me off it. But not my tongue.

ANDREWS

When next we meet, Dr. Franklin, may it be in triumph.

FRANKLIN

From my heart I hope so.

(As the members of the Assembly exeunt, Deborah enters, left. She still retains her sparkling glance. Her dark hair is faintly touched with gray. She comes to Franklin with proof sheets in her hand, gives a quick look to see that she is not overheard, sees that the men who are leaving are deep in talk)

DEBORAH

How are things going, Ben? You are looking anxious.

FRANKLIN

I am anxious. You know the Assembly voted to send an agent to petition the King of England against unjust taxation, and I suggested Galloway, a loyal man, a sincere patriot. Everything was going as I hoped when suddenly the leader of the King's party suggested Dickinson——

DEBORAH

Dickinson——

FRANKLIN

Dickinson, who's a tool of theirs, a puppet, who would betray America at his first chance. If the Assembly chooses Dickinson it will be such a calamity that——

(Breaks off)

But I won't think it—I can't think it.

(He begins to walk up and down)

DEBORAH

Is there nothing any one can do?

FRANKLIN

You can give this paper to Mr. Adams if he calls for it. It's a list of the resolutions for the Assembly.

(Deborah puts it in jar on desk)

DEBORAH

I've been correcting the proofs of your article against unjust taxation.

FRANKLIN

You shouldn't work on your birthday.

DEBORAH

As long as I can't have my present——

FRANKLIN

You shall have your present at seven precisely.
You weren't born till seven, you know.

DEBORAH

Will I like it?

FRANKLIN

You'll adore it.

*(He is putting the proof sheets on table, and
quickly places his hand over hers)*

Take care. That metal box is charged with electricity.

DEBORAH

I shan't go near it. I'm not convinced that your strange discovery isn't necromancy.

FRANKLIN

That's what the world thinks, too. The world that deemed me crazy when I flew a kite in a thunderstorm. That's why I'll have to keep my experiments a secret until—ah, come in, Richard.

*(Enter right, young Richard Austin, very much
like his father, save that he shows the results*

of ease and education. He has charm, enthusiasm)

RICHARD

May I offer greetings to you both, and a special greeting to you, Mistress Franklin? Many happy returns of the day from my father and myself.

(Presents frilled bouquet)

DEBORAH

Thank you both, my dear Richard. You're the image of what your father was at your age. The very image. Did you wish to speak to my husband?

RICHARD

Yes.

(Turns)

I want to offer my services in the present crisis. I hear that you said at the Assembly that at a time like this leaders were needed, men with sagacity and forethought.

FRANKLIN

Yes. Aren't you rather young?

(He and Deborah exchange amused glances as scene proceeds)

RICHARD

I shall be nineteen in April, and besides it isn't years that count, it's forethought.

FRANKLIN

I see. You are familiar with our measures in the Assembly?

RICHARD

It is rumored that you want to send Galloway to England, but I can't see that it's so terribly important. There is one great thing that has been overlooked.

FRANKLIN

Ah!

RICHARD

Suppose Galloway is chosen. Suppose he does petition the King. And suppose the King doesn't listen. What then?

(He delivers this speech with the air of a master strategist)

FRANKLIN

You think I'm flying a kite in a thunderstorm?

RICHARD

(A bit confused)

No—that is—I——

FRANKLIN

(Kindly)

You didn't dream that there might be *more* than a petition? Sit down, Richard. I'll tell you what I told

a secret meeting of patriots two months ago. If the petition fails we'll send the agent to France.

RICHARD

(Dazed)

To France——

FRANKLIN

To France, who fears King George and his sycophants. To France, who might become our ally.

RICHARD

(Still dazed)

But we're a mere handful, we've no power, no prestige. How will France listen?

FRANKLIN

She must be made to listen.

RICHARD

And who will make her?

FRANKLIN

Galloway. Galloway, who has tact and courage and sincerity. That's why it's so vitally important that Galloway be chosen. Now you see.

RICHARD

I see I've been a fool.

FRANKLIN

You must learn to follow before you learn to lead.
I am in need of followers.

RICHARD

But not such a one as I am. Why, I can't even
think for myself.

FRANKLIN

That's exactly why you're valuable.

*(Letitia appears in doorway, right. She is very
young and pretty)*

LETITIA

May I come in?

DEBORAH

My dear Letitia!

*(All turn. Letitia curtseys to Dr. Franklin and
Mrs. Franklin, then comes quickly to Richard)*

LETITIA

Well?

RICHARD

Well?

LETITIA

Has nothing happened?

RICHARD

Happened?

LETITIA

(To Franklin)

Richard was sure that you'd appoint him to something—a chairmanship at home, or a secretaryship abroad.

RICHARD

(Horried)

Letitia!

LETITIA

Well, you said yourself it was only a matter of letting him see how fitted you were——

RICHARD

Letitia! You've ruined everything!

FRANKLIN

If what I hope will happen does happen, I'm not sure that a foreign secretaryship isn't a good suggestion.

LETITIA

You mean you'd send him abroad?

(Her face falls)

FRANKLIN

Isn't that what you wanted?

LETITIA

It's what I thought I wanted. Will he——

(With elaborate unconcern)

Does one stay long?

FRANKLIN

Five or six years. And a secretary can't marry.
It would mean waiting——

RICHARD

But the opportunities for rising are great?

FRANKLIN

Very great.

RICHARD

Letitia, do you feel that you——

LETITIA

(With icy hauteur)

What possible interest can this have for me?

(With a sob in her throat)

Ambition is everything. Women are nothing!

*(She turns from him. Franklin rises, half
amused, half perturbed. Bretelle enters right.
Franklin sees him)*

FRANKLIN

Ah, come in, Bretelle. You want the proof sheets.

BRETELLE

Yes, Monsieur.

FRANKLIN

(To Richard, clapping Bretelle on the shoulder)

You'd think to see him that he was just a printer, too busy to have an eye on politics, and instead—behold an ardent patriot, working for our cause and bringing us whatever news he hears.

BRETELLE

I have some now, Monsieur. Lord Rockminster landed this morning.

(Franklin looks concerned)

DEBORAH

Is it bad news, Ben?

FRANKLIN

It isn't good news. Rockminster is a friend of the King's. His presence here will strengthen the King's party. Come, Richard.

BRETELLE

Good luck, Monsieur.

FRANKLIN

Thank you, Bretelle.

DEBORAH

You know all that I wish you.

(Franklin looks toward Letitia, who is at the fire. She turns her head, starts to speak, cannot control the quiver of her lips. Turns away her head without saying anything. Exeunt Franklin and Richard. Letitia turns to Deborah, the traces of tears on her face)

LETITIA

Oh, Mistress Franklin, what shall I do?

DEBORAH

Whatever your heart tells you.

LETITIA

It doesn't speak. It's frozen. He loves his work better than me! Can't I go out the side entrance? People might think I had been crying.

DEBORAH

You'll excuse me, Bretelle?

BRETELLE

But certainly!

(The moment they are gone he begins to spy about. Sees proof on table, takes two of the under pages and puts them in his pocket. He looks quickly at some of the other papers scattered on the table. Finds nothing of value. Tries to lift lid of metal box. The electricity stings him. He gives a smothered cry and

darts away from the table. Speaks in a hoarse whisper)

Black magic! Sorcery!

(He avoids the box and crosses to desk. Finds paper of resolutions but has no time to read it. Deborah enters)

Two of the proof sheets are missing, Madam Franklin.

DEBORAH

That's strange. Ben must have left them in his laboratory. If you'll wait five minutes?

BRETELLE

But certainly!

(Exit Deborah, left. Bretelle takes paper of instructions, reads it, swiftly puts it back. Enter right, Lord Rockminster, a handsome man, richly dressed. He has a pompous manner)

ROCKMINSTER

I hear that Dr. Franklin is not in.

BRETELLE

He's gone to the Assembly.

(With a quick look and lowered voice)

The coast is clear for at least four minutes.

ROCKMINSTER

(Lowered voice)

Well?

BRETELLE

My lord, for months I have spied on Dr. Franklin. But I will spy no longer. He is in league with the devil.

ROCKMINSTER

Nonsense!

BRETELLE

(Indicating metal box on table center)

Touch that, my lord, and see if it is nonsense.

(Rockminster touches it)

ROCKMINSTER

(Stung)

The devil!

BRETELLE

Aye, hell fire, my lord.

(The two men look at each other gravely)

ROCKMINSTER

If he dabbles in black magic as folks say, all the more reason he should be put down. If he serves the devil, you can wear a charm against it, and still serve us. Come, Bretelle, don't be a fool. Think of all the money you are offered, and the chance to deliver him into our hands.

BRETELLE

I will have nothing to do with sorcerers.

ROCKMINSTER

Why should you fear him? For years you've pretended to be his friend. He likes you. He trusts you. You're the last person he'd ever suspect. You've given him information that he thinks is valuable. He believes you spy for him, and instead you spy for us. You told him of my arrival?

BRETELLE

Yes, when it was too late for him to make a move.

ROCKMINSTER

You're succeeding admirably. What more do you ask?

BRETELLE

You think a charm would save me?

ROCKMINSTER

I know it would.

(Indicates box)

Has this thing ever happened before?

BRETELLE

No, my lord.

ROCKMINSTER

It may be years before it will happen again. Beware of him when he makes experiments, avoid this power as you would a pestilence, and you'll be safe. You'll serve us?

BRETELLE

Yes, my lord.

ROCKMINSTER

What have you found?

BRETELLE

Dr. Franklin's resolutions for the Assembly.

ROCKMINSTER

Good. Take this news to our Committee. We can checkmate him.

BRETELLE

(Loudly)

You see what printing does to one's hands, my lord.

(He is spreading out his hands as Deborah enters)

The acid turns the flesh black.

DEBORAH

Here is the duplicate proof, Bretelle.

BRETELLE

I thank you.

(He takes pages, and exits right)

ROCKMINSTER

I am Lord Rockminster. The servant bid me wait.

DEBORAH

My lord!

(Curtseys with a charming grace. Rockminster bows stiffly)

ROCKMINSTER

You will pardon my saying that you are somewhat different from what I expected?

DEBORAH

(Puzzled)

Expected?

ROCKMINSTER

And this room—it's in quite good taste for printers.

DEBORAH

(Demurely)

I'm glad you think so.

ROCKMINSTER

(Looking about)

Quite pretty in fact. Wonderful how the working classes thrive in this country. Simply wonderful!

(Enter Franklin right, followed by Parton, who leaves candles and exits)

DEBORAH

(As if introducing a king)

Lord Rockminster, this is Dr. Franklin.

(The men bow)

ROCKMINSTER

I wished to see you on a most important mission.
May I be assured that we can be alone?

(Looks at Deborah)

FRANKLIN

(Also looking at Deborah)

Deborah, my love!

(Exit Deborah)

Now, my lord.

ROCKMINSTER

I come to you, sir, on a most important errand from the Prime Minister of England. Although you think your plans have been kept secret, England knows that you consider an appeal to France.

FRANKLIN

(With perfect control)

Does she, my lord?

ROCKMINSTER

King George has watched you with interest.

FRANKLIN

(Drily)

Watched is scarcely the word, my lord.

ROCKMINSTER

Sir, I mean what I say.

FRANKLIN

(Tranquilly)

Usually, my lord, a diplomat means what he doesn't say.

ROCKMINSTER

We urge you to give up these foolish attempts you are making—attempts that are doomed to failure.

FRANKLIN

If they are doomed to failure, why are you here, my lord?

ROCKMINSTER

(Furious)

Sir——

FRANKLIN

I will only appeal to France if King George refuses to listen to what I have to say against unjust taxation.

ROCKMINSTER

If you and the British Government could come to amicable terms——

FRANKLIN

What then, my lord?

ROCKMINSTER

The British ministry would see you had a place——

FRANKLIN

The ministry, I am sure, would rather give me place in a cart to Tyburn than any place whatsoever, and for a decoration, my lord, a rope about my neck.

ROCKMINSTER

You misjudge us.

FRANKLIN

Say rather, I judge you too well.

ROCKMINSTER

If you persist——

FRANKLIN

I shall persist——

ROCKMINSTER

(With a sneer)

I see I am dealing with a fanatic.

FRANKLIN

If love of country be fanaticism, yes, my lord.

(Rockminster turns angrily away and comes back with an assumption of friendliness)

ROCKMINSTER

Dr. Franklin, I will be candid with you. I do not come from the Prime Minister alone. I represent a higher power.

FRANKLIN

A higher power?

ROCKMINSTER

The Baron de Weissenstein.

FRANKLIN

(Puzzled)

The Baron de Weissenstein——

ROCKMINSTER

One of the names, sir, of the King of England.

(Takes letter from his pocket)

The name by which he is known throughout the diplomatic circles of Europe. Within this letter he offers you any reward that it is in the power of the Government to bestow——

FRANKLIN

(Softly, as he takes letter)

Reward, my lord?

ROCKMINSTER

(Mistaking the softness)

Ah, you begin to see things in a new light—you are thinking——

FRANKLIN

I am thinking that the Baron de Weissenstein had best bestow his reward elsewhere, my lord.

(Pulls bell rope. Parton, a young servant, enters)

Parton, his lordship's carriage.

(Exit Parton)

ROCKMINSTER

(In a pale fury)

Sir, I warn you. For every move you make, we will make two. We will outbid you, outrun you, out-general you. If you try for France, look to yourself, and to your agent.

FRANKLIN

I will, my lord.

ROCKMINSTER

I trust you will not regret this, Dr. Franklin.

FRANKLIN

I trust not, my lord.

(Exit Rockminster, right. Franklin stands in a brown study, the letter in his hand)

"If you try for France, look to yourself and to your agent——"

(Looks again at letter, musingly)

Undated. And in the King's handwriting.

(Deborah enters left, followed by Richard)

DEBORAH

Was it something important?

FRANKLIN

Most important.

(Richard feels from the tone that something is brewing, and that Franklin and Deborah want to talk alone)

RICHARD

Shall I go, sir?

FRANKLIN

No, stay. You may as well hear it now as later. The British know I mean to try for France. The King of England has tried to bribe me. This man, this Rockminster, has given new life to the King's party. The moment I entered the Assembly I felt the change. There's not a chance for Galloway.

RICHARD

Not a chance!

DEBORAH

And you've no idea who the spy is?

FRANKLIN

Not the faintest. I only see that everything I've built for, worked for, hoped for——

(He turns abruptly, his voice filled with despair. Stands with his back to audience)

DEBORAH

(Her hand on his shoulder)
We've faced black days before, Ben.

FRANKLIN

But never so black as this.

(Faint sound of march music coming nearer)

RICHARD

(Looking out of window, back)

Torchlight and music. Men are marching.

FRANKLIN

The tardy members going to the Assembly.

DEBORAH

Aren't you going, Ben?

FRANKLIN

(Wearily)

There's nothing more that I can do. They know my wishes, but I can't impose my wishes on them. Richard is to bring me word of their decision.

(Torchlight comes nearer. Streams through windows in background. Cries without of "Ben Franklin! Speech! Speech!")

DEBORAH

They're calling for a speech.

FRANKLIN

They know already what I want.

RICHARD

And they're going to defeat it.

FRANKLIN

No! By heaven they shan't defeat it till I've struck

one more blow. Lord Rockminster thought he was crushing me. Instead he put a weapon into my hands.

(He crosses to window. A cheer goes up. He begins speaking)

Men of the Assembly, Fellow Citizens, a lord who has lately landed has offered me a bribe if I will desert the cause.

(Dead silence without, then an angry murmur)

But I've shown him that though we're a young country and a poor country, we're not a corruptible country.

(Cheers)

We know that taxation without representation is tyranny. We know that if we don't hang together we may all hang separately!

(Laughter. Cheers)

Therefore, choose for your agent a man who is not afraid of Kings, a strong man, a man so skilled in the arts of diplomacy that he can pit his wit against the courts of Europe. You know my wishes. You know whom I have in mind. I need not name him to you. If a revolution is coming and you would see wrong righted, choose Galloway! If you would serve the American cause, choose Galloway! If you are patriots, choose Galloway, and save your country!

(Wild cheers. Then cries of "Galloway" and "Franklin" growing fainter as music starts up and crowd moves away)

DEBORAH

They will choose Galloway. I'm sure of it.

FRANKLIN

There's a gleam of hope. But in politics you can't be sure of anything.

(Bretelle enters, cat-footed, from right)

Richard, you are the one to lift our hopes, or dash them.

RICHARD

(Going)

I'll be back the moment I hear, sir.

(Exit Richard. Franklin sees Bretelle)

BRETELLE

I came to see if there was anything you wished me to do, sir. Any help I could give.

FRANKLIN

There's nothing to do but wait, and keep your eyes open. A spy is watching me.

BRETELLE

(Shaken)

What?

FRANKLIN

(Sorting papers on desk)

I say a spy is watching me. He has attended our patriot meetings, and given away our plans.

BRETELLE

(Moistening his lips)

Do you know—who he is?

FRANKLIN

(Innocently)

If you're as good at catching spies as you are at catching information, I may soon find him. Set a spy to catch a spy, eh, Bretelle?

BRETELLE

(Paralyzed)

What do you mean?

(Speaks voicelessly)

FRANKLIN

(Unconscious of anything amiss)

You have already spied for us. Go one step further and find the man. A sly, a cautious one.

BRETELLE

(Sees Franklin does not suspect him; begins to breathe more freely. Has even a touch of his old, sardonic humor)

I am afraid you overestimate me.

FRANKLIN

(Heartily)

Not a bit of it! I need your help.

BRETELLE

(Very earnestly)

And I will give it. You must be patient. He must be a very clever spy if he can get ahead of you. It will take time——

FRANKLIN

It may take time, but in the end I'll get him. You must be my shadow, Bretelle. Go with me everywhere. Watch all those who watch me.

BRETELLE

(Grasping Franklin's hand)

I promise it. I will come back after the meeting.
Au revoir, Madame, Monsieur.

(Exit Bretelle left)

FRANKLIN

(To Deborah)

Now, while we wait—your present.

(Takes something from center table wrapped in tissue paper)

Can you guess what it is?

(Teasingly)

DEBORAH

Don't keep me waiting.

FRANKLIN

Well then.

(Gives her the present)

An electric battery, the smallest and the best I've ever made. Perfect in every detail.

DEBORAH

(Trying hard to act pleased)

Why—why—thank you, Ben, dear, it's—it's lovely!

FRANKLIN

(Watching her)

I'm glad you like it.

DEBORAH

I'm charmed with it.

FRANKLIN

Deceitful Deborah! You thought you could fool your husband. You're disappointed, and you're trying to hide it. Well, all good wives who try to hoodwink their husbands shall be rewarded.

(Takes something from behind his back)

There's your present!

(Holds up string of milky, perfectly matched pearls)

DEBORAH

Pearls!

FRANKLIN

For my pearl of great price!

DEBORAH

(Gaily)

And I've a present for you!

FRANKLIN

But it's not my birthday.

DEBORAH

All the same, you are to have it. A political locket.

(Gives him a black enameled locket the size of an average envelope. It hangs on a black velvet ribbon)

You can keep important letters in it.

(As she gives it to him he kisses and holds her hand, looking at her)

FRANKLIN

I'll keep the King's letter in it.

(Puts it in locket)

DEBORAH

(Very tenderly)

Whenever you touch this locket you are to remember some one who loved you as her own soul, whose greatest happiness was to help you.

(More lightly)

Ah, I've had the happiest birthday! Your speech! And to hear them cheer you! How they love you, Ben.

FRANKLIN

That's what Mrs. Galloway is saying to her husband. It's a great thing to be a statesman.

(Something in his tone makes her look at him keenly)

DEBORAH

Ben!

FRANKLIN

Yes, dear?

DEBORAH

You wanted it! You wanted to be the agent!

FRANKLIN

Galloway's a good man. I hope from my heart they'll send him.

DEBORAH

Ben! You're evading me. Look in my eyes. *You wanted it.* You worked for Galloway and yet you wanted it.

FRANKLIN

(Half whimsical, half serious)

Where shall a man confess himself unless to his wife?

(Then, deeply)

Yes, Deborah, I wanted it. It's always been my dream to be a statesman, and that agency will make for statesmanship. God! When I think of the opportunity! To strike a blow for America! To rouse King George! To make the House of Lords wake up and listen! To win! Or perhaps to fail! And then to cross the channel, and try for France. To fight the fight with no one aiding you. To have nothing but your own wit to see you through. Amongst the constellations of the world powers to see America

blaze a new, splendid star! To know you put her there!

DEBORAH

Oh, Ben, if it could have come to you! It would have meant that we must part, and yet I'd gladly have sent you just for the sake of seeing you come back with all your townsfolk cheering you!

FRANKLIN

I've had so much to make me happy that I'd be niggardly to ask for more. Who ever journeys straight to the goal? Who ever reaches all he dreams or hopes for? My dear, if it's any consolation to you, the agent's mission will be both difficult and dangerous.

(Richard enters left, in a high state of excitement)

RICHARD

Dr. Franklin!

(He pauses)

FRANKLIN

Don't be afraid to tell me!

RICHARD

Your resolutions were checkmated. But in spite of that——

(Again Richard pauses as if uncertain of his voice)

FRANKLIN

Richard! Quick! Tell me!

(Andrews, later Braithwaite, Knox and Murray enter)

ANDREWS

They chose as you told them to!

FRANKLIN

(Amazed, delighted)

What!

ANDREWS

They chose a man who is not afraid of Kings, a strong man, a man who can pit his wit against the courts of Europe——

FRANKLIN

Andrews, for God's sake, tell me!

ANDREWS

They've chosen you, sir!

FRANKLIN

They've chosen me!

BRAITHWAITE

Who else should loyal Americans choose? Gallo-way declared for you as well as the others. They suddenly saw that no one could represent them as you could. And the tepid members who didn't know which way to choose were swept off their feet. Except the King's party, every one was for you.

FRANKLIN

But this is unparliamentary, unprecedented!

ANDREWS

The times are unprecedented.

(Bretelle has entered, right. Also Letitia)

FRANKLIN

I'll need two men to help me on my mission. Richard, you shall be one.

(To Bretelle)

And you, old friend, the other.

MURRAY

Your townsfolk are calling you.

(Cheers and the red glow of torchlight outside window)

FRANKLIN

Tell them I am coming.

LETITIA

(To Richard)

I've come to say forgive me, and God speed you!

RICHARD

You'll wait till I come back?

(She nods, he draws her toward him)

LETITIA

If you're too long, I shall come after you.

DEBORAH

(To Franklin)

Oh, Ben, I have great faith in you. But now that it's truly come, now that it's a reality and not a dream—how will they listen? It may take years.

FRANKLIN

I'll make them listen if it takes a century.

DEBORAH

It will be difficult and dangerous. You just said so. And what have you to fight with?

FRANKLIN

I won't fight. I'll work.

DEBORAH

And if that fails you?

FRANKLIN

I'll use the oldest weapon known to statesmen.

DEBORAH

And that is——

FRANKLIN

Strategy.

(He is leading her to the window in background where the cheers are redoubling, as falls the

CURTAIN

ACT IV

Scene I: Franklin's hotel at Passy, 1778.

A room in pale gray, with white woodwork, evidently on the second floor. French windows in background opening on a snowy, park-like landscape.

On each side of the window, narrow curtains of rose satin. There are doors at right and left, near background, opening into other rooms of the house. Bell ropes at right and left.

A hearth at left, with a Franklin stove set near it, the pipe running into the tiled hearth. The grate of the stove glows rosily.

In the center of the room a table-desk with spindle legs. On the table, books, papers, and pens hide experiments with wiring. At right, down stage, Richard's desk, and at left a similar desk for Bretelle.

At right, behind Richard's desk a table with some of Dr. Franklin's electrical experiments, innocent looking to the casual observer. A candle, pens, inkstand, etc., etc. Chairs and a settee upholstered in rose satin cushions.

Musical glasses in front of the window in background complete the furnishings of the room.

The time is late afternoon.

The notes of "Yankee Doodle" tinklingly played are heard. Dr. Franklin, with white hair and dark brows

from under which his dark eyes look brilliantly is seated, at musical glasses—playing. Listening to him are savants in robes of the Universities of Paris, and ladies of the court, magnificently dressed, their fur cloaks over their arms. Bretelle, old and slim, and moving with a quick grace, is listening. Near him is the Countess de Sarnac, a dark slender woman with a bright, hard beauty.

FRANKLIN

(Ceasing to play)

That's the tune that helped us win the battles of Lexington and Bunker Hill, and led to the Declaration of Independence. Now if I could only compose one that would help us sign the French Treaty——

(Laughter)

MME. DE SARNAC

Success is a tune that accomplishes great things, Dr. Franklin.

FRANKLIN

(Urbane)

I am sure of that, Countess. Early in life my wife and I discovered it.

MME. DE SARNAC

It is so sad to think of those poor soldiers starving and freezing at Valley Forge.

FRANKLIN

The signing of the Treaty would be bread and meat to them.

(Richard appears at doorway, left)

RICHARD

Dr. Franklin, Monsieur Fragonard bids me say your portrait is ready for the inspection of all those who wish to see it.

(Murmurs of interest)

FRANKLIN

Ladies, Messieurs the savants, if you would care——

MME. DE SARNAC

But we would be delighted.

RICHARD

(As he passes out with a lady on his arm)

It's a wonderful likeness——

(All go out save the Countess de Sarnac and Bretelle. The Countess, with a look to see that she is not observed, comes quickly down to Bretelle)

MME. DE SARNAC

We must make a move. To-day——

BRETELLE

But——

MME. DE SARNAC

To-day. At court there is a rumor that the King and de Vergennes begin to look with favor on the American Treaty. Vergennes is here in Passy this moment. A little good news from America,

(Gestures)

and the thing is done. Lord Stormount is becoming anxious. He urges haste. I tell you we must strike to-day.

BRETELLE

But, Countess——

MME. DE SARNAC

Unless we do, we are lost. The Baron de Weissenstein will no longer employ us. Are there no papers you can take, Bretelle, you who live with Franklin and see him daily?

BRETELLE

But he is so careful! Any important papers he has I think he sleeps with, or wears in a political locket about his neck. If the American packet would arrive with the despatches——

MME. DE SARNAC

(Eagerly)

Yes!

BRETELLE

But it only comes every six weeks.

MME. DE SARNAC

(With despair)

Every six weeks!

BRETELLE

But the six weeks are up. Some time this week the packet should arrive.

MME. DE SARNAC

This week! I tell you we must strike before good news arrives. To-day, if possible. For years the English put this Franklin off with promises, and now for months our Prime Minister has had reason to hesitate. But men who won't give up always win in the end.

BRETELLE

He won't win! He can't win!

MME. DE SARNAC

He will win, unless we strike to-day. I tell you he——

(She is warned by a look from Bretelle and stops. Glances toward left, and sees Richard entering)

RICHARD

(Bowing, coming down)

Countess!

MME. DE SARNAC

I was just looking at this first edition of Poor Rich-

ard's Almanac. All good advice and not a hint of sentiment. You are so droll, you Americans! You never speak of the tender passion, and yet I hear you've made a love match, and are counting the days till you return to America.

RICHARD

And is that strange?

MME. DE SARNAC

To speak of one's lover—no. But to speak of one's wife—as Dr. Franklin does——

(Laughs, shrugs, raises her eyes to heaven. Then, quickly, to Bretelle, with the utmost demureness)

Thank you, Monsieur, for showing me this book.

(Bows to Bretelle and Richard)

Now that the others have had their turn, I'll see the portrait.

(Exits with languid grace, left)

RICHARD

Too bad to interrupt you, Bretelle, when you were trying to gain information.

(Indicates door left)

She said—nothing?

BRETELLE

Nothing. I tried to sound her on the subject of the King and the Treaty, and she said nothing. I doubt, Monsieur, if she's a spy as Dr. Franklin thinks.

RICHARD

Of course she's a spy. That room——

(Indicates left)

is full of spies. People who come to hear what they can hear and see what they can see. And presently the Duchess de Cleary will be coming, so that she can report all *she* hears to the Prime Minister. He is in Passy to-day, I understand.

BRETELLE

Hush!

(Looks warningly at Richard as Mme. de Sarnac reënters)

MME. DE SARNAC

A wonderful portrait! Charming!

(Bretelle goes slowly up, and exits left)

This room is filled with the most fascinating things.

(Comes to table)

What is this, Monsieur?

RICHARD

One of Dr. Franklin's electrical experiments.

MME. DE SARNAC

(Insinuatingly)

If I could only see it——

RICHARD

No one is ever allowed to see it. Not even myself.

(From left people come back into room with murmurs of "Fragonard at his best," "Such charm!" "Such truth!" etc., etc. As they are entering there also enters from right, the Duchess de Cleary, a very pretty woman. She comes face to face with Franklin)

FRANKLIN

Duchess, this is very good of you.

MME. DE CLEARY

Oh, those stairs! I am so out of breath! And yet I wanted to be the one to tell you——

FRANKLIN

Tell me?

MME. DE CLEARY

The American packet has arrived.

FRANKLIN

The American packet!

(At these words every one in the room turns. There is a sense of expectation and subdued excitement)

MME. DE CLEARY

And the American messenger is coming with your dispatches.

FRANKLIN

But are you sure?

MME. DE CLEARY

I'm certain. He asked my coachman the way to this hotel and understood with difficulty. Oh, I do hope it is good news.

MME. DE SARNAC

We shall be so anxious to hear it.

RICHARD

(At window, back)

Dr. Franklin, it is the messenger.

MME. DE CLEARY

I have never been more excited, more anxious! This is as tantalizing as any moment at the opera!

MME. DE SARNAC

Yes. And to think whatever the news is, we shall hear it first!

(All keep their eyes on Franklin throughout scene.

Enter Parton, left)

PARTON

Mr. Bradley with the American dispatches.

(Enter Bradley, in a dress suggestive of the frontier. He looks blue-white and ill. Black circles under his eyes. Even his lips are white)

FRANKLIN

Welcome, Mr. Bradley. How was your voyage?

BRADLEY

Very rough and cold, sir.

(Holds edge of desk, swaying a little)

The—the important letter is the one in blue and red
—blue and red—

FRANKLIN

(With instant concern)

Why, Mr. Bradley, you look ill! You need warmth
and food.

(To Parton)

Parton, see that Mr. Bradley has everything he
needs.

(To Bradley)

I will be with you soon, sir.

BRADLEY

I—thank you.

(Exeunt Bradley and Parton. Franklin opens bag, takes out American packet bound in blue and red. Opens it. Reads a few lines. His face lights with surprise and rapture. He makes a gesture of delight)

FRANKLIN

(With a cry of happiness)

Richard!

(Quickly grasps Richard's hand)

Ah, my dear boy! My dear boy!

(He appears for a moment quite overcome with emotion)

MME. DE SARNAC

Then it's good news?

FRANKLIN

(Still holding Richard by the arm)

Ladies, you must forgive an old man's emotion!

MME. DE CLEARY

(Quickly)

Has there been a battle?

FRANKLIN

(Rapidly and with joyful emotion)

Ah, no, Madame. Had there been a battle the British Ambassador, Lord Stormount, would have heard of it as soon as I.

(He speaks with a smile)

The greatest triumphs are not always won through battles.

(His face lights victoriously)

There are the triumphs of statecraft!

MMEs. DE SARNAC AND DE CLEARY

Statecraft!

FRANKLIN

I wish I might share my news with you. But for the present it must remain a secret of state.

MME. DE SARNAC

But we shall know it soon?

FRANKLIN

(Joyously)

Yes. Soon.

(To Richard, gaily)

Ah, Richard, if we could only look ahead when things seem darkest!

MME. DE SARNAC

(Aside to Bretelle)

News which can make him so happy—so triumphant——

MME. DE CLEARY

(Purringly)

You have worked so many years for your country, and now you feel your faith in yourself is justified.

FRANKLIN

Duchess, my faith is always in a Higher Power.

MME. DE SARNAC

He must mean General Washington!

FRANKLIN

Fortune brings in the ship, as the Dutch say.

A LADY

Perhaps it means the Dutch will make a loan if we do not.

(Silent sensation)

A SAVANT

We must let Dr. Franklin have time to read his letters. Our presence here delays him.

(Movement of departure)

MME. DE CLEARY

I'm sure there's much work to be done.

MME. DE SARNAC

(With a look at Bretelle)

Yes, work for everybody.

FRANKLIN

But my dear Messieurs—ladies——

MME. DE CLEARY

I do assure you we only intended to stay an instant.

A SAVANT

That's true, Monsieur.

FRANKLIN

But let me——

MME. DE CLEARY

I have forbidden that you see us to our coaches. I still forbid it.

(Bows, curtseys, general leave taking)

FRANKLIN

Then let Mr. Austin——

MME. DE CLEARY

I will not hear of it.

(Exit Mme. de Cleary)

FRANKLIN

But surely——

MME. DE SARNAC

Bretelle may take my wraps, if he wishes——

FRANKLIN

Bretelle!

(Bretelle takes Countess' wraps)

MME. DE SARNAC

I leave you with my sincerest felicitations.

(Exeunt Mme. de Sarnac and Bretelle. She has left her muff behind her on settee, right, and has looked meaningly at Bretelle. But in the general leave taking this has not been noticed. The last of the guests have bowed and gone. Dr. Franklin stands at table, center)

FRANKLIN

Are they quite gone?

RICHARD

(At window)

Almost.

(Turns to Franklin)

Now for the good news.

FRANKLIN

My dear friend, it isn't good news. It's bad news.

RICHARD

(Stunned)

What! But you just said——

FRANKLIN

(Rapidly, yet with emotion)

At this moment, when the Treaty is hanging in the balance, when one word might mean life or death, do you think I'll let such disastrous news as this be known. It's the secret report of the American Committee of Finance. Only General Washington and the Committee know its contents. They have found our resources are nearer exhaustion—our credit lower than any of us have dreamed.

RICHARD

Would this affect the Treaty?

FRANKLIN

Yes. If the French knew how we stood at present it would frighten them. France has been nobly generous to us, yet consider her position:—a German king on the throne of England, a host of aggressive German states on her very borders. Even if she desires to help us she must move carefully. And we—good God, how careful we must be lest we lose France's influence——

RICHARD

(Bewildered)

Yet strategy——

FRANKLIN

(With power)

What is a general but a strategist? Richard, all my life I've fought fairly. I've played with my cards above the table. But now, with spies on every side of me, now, for my country's sake, I fight fire with fire. Could you not see the Duchess watch me like a cat? She fairly raced here to glean the news, and now she's racing back.

RICHARD

Back?

FRANKLIN

To the Prime Minister, Vergennes. Do you forget that he is here in Passy, within a stone's throw? And then, that woman's blunder about Holland! Hah!

If Vergennes thinks Holland is in the air, he'll want to sign the Treaty. I tell you, Richard, with that Treaty signed, America is saved. Without it, she is damned.

PARTON

(Entering)

The Abbe Morrellet. His Reverence bids me say that his foot still troubles him. He cannot climb the stairs. His coach waits at the side entrance.

FRANKLIN

Tell his Reverence I will be down at once.

(Exit Parton)

I must not keep his Reverence waiting.

(To Richard)

Begin work on the dispatches, and sift the letters.

RICHARD

Yes, sir.

(Exit Franklin left. Richard takes letters and dispatches to his desk. Sits down. Opens a letter and begins to read. Parton enters in agitation, from right)

PARTON

Mr. Austin——

RICHARD

(Absorbed)

Yes?

PARTON

Mr. Bradley, our American Messenger, is quite ill. I do not know whether I should interrupt the Doctor and the Abbe, or send for a physician.

RICHARD

(Beginning to gather up papers)

Tell Bradley I'll be down in a moment. Stay with him till I come. I'll answer for it.

PARTON

Yes, sir.

(Exit Parton, right. Richard quickly and deftly picks up letters and dispatches and puts them in drawer of his desk. Locks drawer. Then gives it a little pull. It stands firm. Slips key into his pocket. Exits hastily, right. The moment he is gone the door at left opens cautiously, and Bretelle peers into the room. Enters quickly, carrying a bunch of keys and a long ledger. Comes directly to center desk. Cautiously and swiftly unlocks drawer, thrusts in his hand. Finds nothing that he wants. Closes and locks drawer. Crosses to desk at right. As he crosses Parton enters from right with a magnificent looking letter on a silver salver. Bretelle looks round innocently)

PARTON

For Dr. Franklin.

BRETTELLE

I will tell him.

(Exit Parton. Bretelle immediately goes to desk right. Opens it in same manner as desk at center. Extracts red and blue dispatch. Puts it in his ledger. Closes drawer and locks it, and is just turning when Mme. de Sarnac enters. She speaks to him in a low voice as she crosses for her muff)

MME. DE SARNAC

You have succeeded?

BRETTELLE

(With equal caution)

Yes.

MME. DE SARNAC

(Same)

You can escape at once. There's no one watching.

(Bretelle gives her his keys and the dispatches.

As he is doing so, and before she has quite concealed the dispatches in her muff Richard enters suddenly, left. He stops short at sight of her.

RICHARD

Countess!

MME. DE SARNAC

I was so stupid. Forgot my muff with some of my

jewels in it. I did not like to send my footman up for it. One must not put temptation in another's way.

RICHARD

They're safe, I trust?

(He looks at her keenly)

MME. DE SARNAC

Perfectly. Adieu, Monsieur.

(She curtsseys and edges toward door, right. Bretelle edges after her)

RICHARD

(Bowling to Mme. de Sarnac)

Don't go, Bretelle. I want to consult you about Mr. Bradley.

(Bretelle pauses, uncertain whether to go or stay.)

Mme. de Sarnac exits)

François is saddling a horse for me. Mr. Bradley has been taken with a chill. We need a doctor and supplies.

(Bretelle looks relieved. Franklin enters, left)

FRANKLIN

Is Bretelle here?

BRETELLE

I was just going to Mr. Bradley.

FRANKLIN

Mr. Bradley seems better, but we can't be too careful. Here's the list of what we need.

(He starts to give Richard the list. As he is doing so Richard opens his desk and gives a cry of alarm)

RICHARD

Dr. Franklin! The dispatches! They're gone!

FRANKLIN

(Startled)

Wait, Bretelle.

(Nervously grasps Bretelle's arm)

What do you mean?

RICHARD

I locked them in my desk, and they are gone!

FRANKLIN

You're certain?

(He releases Bretelle, who looks uncertain whether to go or to stay it out)

RICHARD

I locked them there before I went to Mr. Bradley.

(He pulls himself together, but it is evident that he is struggling with strong emotion)

FRANKLIN

But no one's been here except those whom we trust.

Bretelle, you must help us sift this thing to the bottom. Who has been in this room since I left it?

RICHARD

No one except Bretelle.

(And as an after thought)

Oh, and the Countess!

FRANKLIN

The Countess!

RICHARD

(Excitedly)

She forgot her muff and came back for it, and now that I remember it, she was putting a paper in it.

FRANKLIN

Well?

RICHARD

I—I—well, the truth is, it was Bretelle who gave it to her!

BRETELLE

Dr. Franklin, I appeal to you. I gave no paper to the Countess. Monsieur Richard suffers from an hallucination.

RICHARD

I am not given to hallucinations.

FRANKLIN

Bretelle, for years some one has been selling me to King George and his followers, and I have sworn that some day I would get him. If I thought that it was you—you whom I have always trusted, whom I have cherished as a friend——

BRETELLE

I swear it is not I!

FRANKLIN

You and the Countess, often together, we thought that you were gaining information from her, and instead——

BRETELLE

If this thing were true, I could have escaped while you and Richard were talking.

FRANKLIN

A step toward that door in such a crisis would have proved your guilt, and you are clever enough to know it.

BRETELLE

Do you condemn me without proof?

FRANKLIN

I have the proof of a hundred memories of things that you have done that now seem significant.

BRETELLE

You have no certainty of what you say, Monsieur.

FRANKLIN

That is true. But I will have certainty.

(To Richard)

Richard, send François to the village, and meanwhile leave word that I am not to be disturbed for the next half hour unless I ring. You may say that important news precludes my seeing visitors. Will you remain downstairs, and see that no one leaves this house, or enters it?

RICHARD

(A bit awed)

Yes, Doctor.

(Exit Richard. Franklin turns to Bretelle)

FRANKLIN

Now, Bretelle, I ask you. What were the papers that Richard observed you giving to the Countess?

BRETELLE

I gave no papers to the Countess.

FRANKLIN

Bretelle, for many years you have been paid to spy on me. I'll give you twice as much as you've been offered to get the information I desire.

BRETTELLE

I've told you that I have no information.

FRANKLIN

Be warned, Bretelle. Now that my eyes are open I read you like a book. You thought you could sell me. You thought it was only on human power I was relying. You were wrong. You may tamper with me, Bretelle, but be careful how you tamper with the Prince of the Powers of the Air.

BRETTELLE

*(Fingers the charm hung about his neck rapidly.
Twilight falls)*

Monsieur means?

FRANKLIN

I only say, be careful. I give you one more chance. Are you willing to swear and to sign a paper to the effect that you have not touched the dispatches?

BRETTELLE

(Relieved, ceasing to finger his charm)

Yes, Monsieur. Quite willing. And when I have done so, Monsieur will let me go?

FRANKLIN

What reason could I have for keeping you?

BRETTELLE

Then I am ready.

(He stands at Franklin's desk. Franklin, seated at his desk, pushes forward a book. Through all that follows he manipulates the wires on his desk very quietly, his eyes fixed on Bretelle. Bretelle starts to put his hand on the book)

I swear that I had nothing——

(The book bursts into blue flame beneath his hand. He finishes with a gasp)

Nothing whatever to do with the dispatches.

FRANKLIN

Now you may sign. Ink and pens are on the table yonder.

BRETELLE

(Beginning to be afraid, and fingering his charm)

It is too dark.

FRANKLIN

(Grimly)

You will be lighted.

(Just as Bretelle sits down a large candle on the table appears to light all of itself. Bretelle rises nervously and then sits down again. Starts to dip his pen in the ink well. Blue sparks fly upward. He drops the pen.)

BRETELLE

Monsieur!

(As he turns toward Franklin a white light flares out on the table and vanishes. Bretelle gives a cry, clutches the table edge)

It's sorcery!

FRANKLIN

(With mounting anger)

Bretelle, I warned you not to tamper with me. Why, as you sit there I can see your past rise around you. I know you now for what you are. You ate my bread, you shared my roof, you took all the advancement I could give you, and you betrayed me.

BRETELLE

Never!

FRANKLIN

Don't lie to me. Your very soul is clear to me. Incapable of honest effort yourself, you hated all those who succeeded by it. You hated me, yet you pretended friendship. You would have defeated my efforts here in France, you did defeat them in London.

(Suddenly, with his hand on his locket)

You attended our patriot meetings in America—My God! I see it now! It was you who would have blasted my life, my happiness.

BRETELLE

(Cowering)

No!

FRANKLIN

(Sweeping on)

You are not even a paid spy working for your country's good. You are a human jackal, without feeling, without mercy. Before you went to America, what was the deed that caused you to leave France?

(Bretelle starts)

I see it written in your face!

(Watches him keenly to see what this guess will do)

BRETELLE

No! No! No! I swear I had no hand in that! I swear it!

(Grabs pen, speaks pantingly)

I'll sign, I'll sign——

(The room has been gradually darkening. Bretelle starts to dip pen into ink well. Red sparks fly up from it. He drops the pen, his face livid)

FRANKLIN

If that pen disturbs you, another is in the box beside you.

(Bretelle hastily tries to open the box which contains the battery, fumbling about it hastily, gropingly)

Lift the handles.

(Bretelle lifts what he thinks are the handles, pulls at them, and Franklin switches on the current)

BRETTELLE

(Writhing)

Oh, holy Saints! I'm being murdered. It's witchcraft. Ten thousand devils prick me. I will confess. I gave the papers to the Countess!

FRANKLIN

What will she do with them?

BRETTELLE

She'll give them to Lord Stormount.

FRANKLIN

But he's in Holland.

BRETTELLE

He will come back and face you—publicly.

(Strong white light shines on the table and vanishes)

That's all! That's all, I swear!

(Franklin switches off current, and Bretelle drops in a limp heap in his chair)

Holy St. Mercury!

FRANKLIN

(Tersely)

Get up.

BRETTELLE

What are you going to do with me?

FRANKLIN

I'm going to put you where your fangs won't poison people. Which will you choose, the prefect of police, or a sea voyage?

BRETELLE

(In a whisper, his eyes wide with terror)

I'll choose—the voyage.

(Enter Parton with branched candlesticks which light up the room. He places them)

FRANKLIN

Parton, Monsieur Bretelle is going on a sea voyage. You will accompany him as you did the spy in London six years ago. Here is a letter to the captain of the American packet at Auray, and traveling money.

PARTON

Sir, have you seen the letter that came a short time since?

FRANKLIN

(Glancing toward it)

Ah, thank you, Parton.

(Parton crosses to Bretelle)

Monsieur Bretelle may need assistance. His nerves are shaky. Let him lean on you.

(Franklin pulls bell rope right, as Parton and Bretelle exeunt. Then Franklin reads the letter which Parton brought, very thoughtfully. Richard enters, left)

RICHARD

Dr. Franklin, have you discovered the whereabouts of the dispatches?

FRANKLIN

(Looking up from his letter)

Yes.

RICHARD

Thank heaven! But you don't seem excited!

FRANKLIN

I have been reading an invitation. On Thursday of next week we are invited to be the guests of the King and Queen of France in order to sign the Treaty.

RICHARD

Then it's come true at last! All that you've striven for! It's glorious! Stupendous! Think what you've done for your country!

FRANKLIN

(Deeply)

I am thinking.

RICHARD

Your dream is realized!

FRANKLIN

My dream turns out a nightmare. Richard, we're sold. Bretelle has played the spy and given the finan-

cial papers to De Sarnac. She'll give them to Lord Stormount.

RICHARD

But he's in Holland.

FRANKLIN

By traveling at top speed he can be back by Thursday.

RICHARD

Thursday—You don't mean——

FRANKLIN

Yes. He'll face us at Versailles, so our defeat will be a public one. De Vergennes will refuse to sign.

RICHARD

Arrest Bretelle!

FRANKLIN

And have the police question him, and spread the report of America's finances even further? I want him out of the way. I've oriented him.

RICHARD

Arrest the Countess. Take the papers from her!

FRANKLIN

Arrest a woman of rank in her own country, and bring the monarchy about our ears? You are mad!

RICHARD

There's one more way. Refuse the invitation.
Don't go to court.

FRANKLIN

I must think.

RICHARD

Don't accept it. We'll be discountenanced, humiliated, the laugh of Europe. I see it all. We're trapped—trapped on all sides. Nothing can save us but a miracle, and miracles don't happen.

FRANKLIN

We must make one happen. This is the time to fight, not turn our backs and run. Versailles shall be our battle ground. Only, in place of gunpowder we'll use strategy; diplomacy instead of muskets. We'll deal Lord Stormount thrust for thrust, and blow for blow.

RICHARD

But how?

FRANKLIN

Wait until Thursday.

CURTAIN

ACT IV

Scene II: The Hall des Ambassadeurs, Versailles, France.

A long narrow hall in pale gray, flanked at right and left by walls of the same neutral color.

At right, a door leads into another room.

All across the background hangs an arras of cloth of gold starred with white fleur de lis. Against this, center, a black lacquered table and chair. Gold sconces filled with candles jut from the walls at right and left.

There is a blaze of splendor. People are promenading, and music plays faintly off stage. As soon as the curtain has risen the music stops.

Amongst those present are Mons. Girard, the Count de Vergennes, Mme. de Sarnac, the Duchess de Cleary, Ladies of the Court, Foreign Diplomats, Envoys. A Cardinal in his red robes.

MME. DE SARNAC

(Tapping Girard with her fan)

Monsieur Girard!

GIRARD

(Turning)

Mme. de Sarnac, charming as always.

MME. DE SARNAC

Tell me, you who know everything——

GIRARD

Oh, no, Madame, only the half of everything. And then I try to guess the other half.

MME. DE SARNAC

Tell me, is it true that when Dr. Franklin arrives this hall must be cleared?

GIRARD

I fear so.

(They pass, talking. A Court Lady and the Duchess de Cleary come down)

MME. DE CLEARY

No one can talk of anything but America's victory, Dr. Franklin, and the loan. If there's any more crowding we shall have to stand on tiptoe and look over each other's shoulders. Some one has just asked me how they are to know Dr. Franklin, and if he will wear gold brocade and jewels. And I told my questioner, "Look for the simplest man in the room. That will be he!"

(They pass, talking)

MME. DE SARNAC

(Coming down on the arm of a Russian Diplomat, wonderful in sables)

That's the Queen's favorite air they're playing. The King and Queen are in the next room. Did you know?

(Two people come up to them. The Diplomat bows, and begins to talk. The Duchess de Cleary comes up to Mme. de Sarnac)

MME. DE CLEARY

Lord Stormount, the British Ambassador, has just arrived. I thought he was in Holland.

MME. DE SARNAC

He's just come back, post haste.

MME. DE CLEARY

It's strange that he should be here on the night we honor a great American.

MME. DE SARNAC

I think it shows great nonchalance, great courage.

MME. DE CLEARY

I think it shows he wants nothing to pass which he does not report to his government.

(Mme. de Sarnac bows to Mme. de Cleary, and moves languidly to left, where she is instantly joined by Lord Stormount, a pompous, red-faced individual in scarlet velvet)

MME. DE SARNAC

(Gaily)

I was afraid you might be late.

(In a lower voice)

You got my letter?

STORMOUNT

Yes. I left at once.

MME. DE SARNAC

Here is the original dispatch. I've sent a copy to the King of England.

STORMOUNT

Madame, you are incomparable. This piece of paper will keep another piece of paper from being signed.

GIRARD

(To a lady, right)

The other plenipotentiaries have arrived. Mr. Adams is already here. But Dr. Franklin is late. I hear the crowd about his carriage is so great that he can scarcely make his way. All along the road from Passy to Versailles people have stood to cheer him.

(As she speaks, Letitia, who has been standing in the crowd right, moves forward, and comes face to face with Richard, who enters left)

RICHARD

(Hardly able to believe his eyes)

Letitia!

LETITIA

(*Very happy*)
Richard!

RICHARD

Are you a dream?

LETITIA

No. I'm an impatient reality. I began to think you were never coming home again, and so I came for you.

MME. DE CLEARY

(*To a diplomat*)

They're going to clear the hall. Dr. Franklin must be coming.

(*A lackey enters from left, carrying a wand, each end tipped with a golden ball. This he carries before him. The people understand the signal. There is a general movement towards the door right. De Vergennes, slight and distinguished, steps forward from right, followed by Mons. Girard. The people back of him stop a moment, looking eagerly toward left. Franklin enters, left, dressed in plain black velvet, with white linen ruffles. His white hair is worn straight and without a queue. He wears no ornaments save his political locket. Richard stands waiting, left.*)

DE VERGENNES

(Bowing)

Dr. Franklin, in the name of France, I bid you welcome.

FRANKLIN

Count de Vergennes, in the name of America, I thank you.

(All the people have gone out, save those who are to sign the treaty, and Lord Stormount, who lingers)

GIRARD

Their majesties bid me say that they await you.

(As de Vergennes, Girard and Franklin, followed by Richard, approach room at right, Stormount starts in front of them)

STORMOUNT

Count de Vergennes, one moment. Before the papers of the French and American Alliance are signed, there is a matter with which I, as British Ambassador to the Court of France, feel it my duty to acquaint you.

(De Vergennes and Girard show the utmost surprise. Each looks apprehensive. Only Dr. Franklin preserves a tranquil front, looking as if nothing had happened)

DE VERGENNES

My lord, this is most unusual.

STORMOUNT

I beg you to go no further with the American Treaty till you have heard me.

GIRARD

(Startled)

The American Treaty!

STORMOUNT

Hear me or not, as you like, but after the Treaty is signed, remember that I tried to warn you.

GIRARD

My lord, have you thought of the consequences of this action? Can you step between two powers?

STORMOUNT

I can warn a power to which my country is still friendly.

DE VERGENNES

But does this matter concern Dr. Franklin?

STORMOUNT

Unhappily, yes, Monsieur.

FRANKLIN

"Unhappily?" Then by all means, Count de Vergennes, I beg you to hear it.

(They go to table background)

DE VERGENNES

What is it you have to say, my Lord Stormount?

STORMOUNT

(Ignoring Franklin and speaking to Vergennes)

Monsieur, in dealing with America you think you are dealing with an impoverished nation to which your country has lent money. But do you know how deeply impoverished? Has the report of the Committee on American Finance been shown you?

DE VERGENNES

(Puzzled)

I think not, my lord.

STORMOUNT

Pray then, examine it.

(Gives him dispatch)

DE VERGENNES

But how was this dispatch obtained, Monsieur?

STORMOUNT

It was taken from Dr. Franklin's house by a friend of France and England.

DE VERGENNES

A friend of France and England? You mean a spy, my lord?

STORMOUNT

The fortunes of war, Monsieur. But whether taken

by a spy or not, the facts are accurate. For the sake of France you cannot ignore them. The seals and signatures are genuine, read for yourself. "In spite of all that France has lent us our resources are lower than any one has dreamed, our credit is at a discount. Heaven alone knows how long it will be before we can make financial readjustment."

DE VERGENNES

(Startled)

Ha!

(He looks at paper closely)

STORMMOUNT

Will you sign a Treaty with a country that is bankrupt, tho' her plenipotentiary tries to hide the fact from you?

DE VERGENNES

Dr. Franklin, I am forced to ask you, what of this statement?

FRANKLIN

(Tranquilly, his hand on his locket)

Monsieur, if France desires to withdraw from the Treaty there are other countries who will make terms with us.

STORMMOUNT

(Insolently)

If this is not an American boast, sir, name the country.

FRANKLIN

Your own, my lord.

STORMOUNT

(Outraged)

That's false!

DE VERGENNES

Lord Stormount!

STORMOUNT

Monsieur, a copy of this paper was instantly dispatched to the King of England. For a week his Majesty has known what all the world will soon know—the financial pit into which America has fallen.

FRANKLIN

(To Stormount)

Yet in spite of that fact, your King still covets the advantages that America's future commerce might bring him. I beg you to peruse this letter from the Baron de Weissenstein.

STORMOUNT

(Startled)

The Baron de Weissenstein!

FRANKLIN

(To Vergennes)

The diplomatic name of the King of England. You

will recognize the King's handwriting and the royal seal.

STORMOUNT

Monsieur, I demand to know how this letter came.

FRANKLIN

By a special messenger. Fortunes of war, my lord. It offers me a place near the King's person, honors, a dukedom, if I will use my influence with America. England knows the prize she is losing. Would the King of England write such a letter if he did not see in America's future all that France sees?

(He passes the letter to Vergennes. Vergennes and Girard look at it)

I tell you, Messieurs, opportunity is knocking at the doors of France—opportunity clad in rags, but with the riches of an undeveloped continent behind her.

STORMOUNT

(Shaken)

A bankrupt nation——

FRANKLIN

(With power)

No. The chief part of our nation has not gone bankrupt. I mean the American spirit, my lord. The spirit your Hessians have come to fear, the spirit your King would make terms with if he could!

(While Franklin has been speaking the letter has been passed to Stormount, who reads it and looks stunned)

DE VERGENNES

What have you to say to this letter, my lord?

STORMOUNT

It—it is his Majesty's writing—it seems a genuine document. I—I beg to withdraw.

(He exits, right)

DE VERGENNES

(To Franklin)

Their Majesties will become impatient. Have you your duplicate of the treaty, Monsieur?

FRANKLIN

(Showing it)

It only lacks the signatures.

DE VERGENNES

We will announce your coming.

(De Vergennes and Girard enter door at right, from which a bright light streams out. Franklin and Richard follow them. The door is closed. At the same time the doors at upper right are opened and the crowd streams in again)

MME. DE CLEARY

They haven't come in yet! How disappointing! Count de Vergennes said that the moment the treaty was signed we should have a signal that no one could mistake.

THE CROWD

Ah!

(The door at right opens. Bright light streams out. A lackey stands at center background as if expecting a signal. Hidden music bursts into "Yankee Doodle" and simultaneously the lackey pulls the gold cord on the suspended draperies, which fall and fill the background with the flags of France and America. At the same time Franklin appears in the doorway with the Treaty in his hand. He moves toward left, the people bowing as he passes, the ladies looking at him and smiling, all save Mme. de Sarnac who drops her eyes. De Vergennes and Girard stand at door right. Richard follows Franklin. At left, for a moment, they find themselves alone. Letitia has slipped her arm through Richard's and stands with him. Dr. Franklin reaches out his hand to her, drawing her to him)

RICHARD

(Still dazed)

Dr. Franklin—that de Weissenstein letter—who brought it?

FRANKLIN

Lord Rockminster.

RICHARD

How wonderful that it should have come after that terrible financial statement!

FRANKLIN

It didn't.

RICHARD

Didn't!

FRANKLIN

Always date your letters. This particular letter is many years old.

CURTAIN



NOTES ON HISTORIC SOURCES

As has been stated in the preface to this play, dramatic action has required a certain amount of rearrangement of historic events. In a life as varied and crowded as that of Franklin—a life passed in three countries—it is impossible to touch on all the personages and all the happenings. Therefore those must be selected which advance the story, for as Mr. A. B. Walkley of the *London Times* has recently said: "A play must before everything else, be a play."

The incident of the de Weissenstein letter has been placed earlier in Franklin's life than was actually the case. This astonishing document was thrown in Franklin's window while Franklin was at Passy. The reply he made to it was the reply he gives to Lord Rockminster in Act III. But such a letter, mysteriously thrown in a window, is an incident that has no particular dramatic import until there comes a clash of wills, and therefore it was found expedient for purposes of dramatic motivation to have this letter from the King sent by a messenger to whom Franklin could verbally reply, repudiating the bribe in *words* instead of in *writing*. Both James Parton and John Adams have a good deal to relate concerning this particular document. Says Parton in his *Life of Franklin*, Vol. II.:—

"On a morning in June a packet was thrown into a window at Passy, which proved to be a long letter addressed to Dr. Franklin, written in the English language . . . and signed Charles de Weissenstein. . . . as Franklin thought, a message from the King himself, certainly written with the King's knowledge and consent."

It offered "Offices, pensions for life, a peerage" if Franklin would desist in his efforts, and agree to the King's demands.

In his diary, John Adams, in speaking of the de Weissenstein letter says:—Dr. Franklin "affirmed to me that he knew it came from the king: it could not have come from any other without the king's knowledge—"

Franklin wittily repudiated the offer of a peerage, which the letter contained, declaring it to be "a tar-and-feather honor."

As to Franklin's coup in the last act, all biographers of Franklin hint at a "secret document" which played an important part in the negotiations. Jay speaks of a "certain secret intercepted document" and in the *Everyman* edition of the *Life and Writings of Benjamin Franklin* occurs this passage, already quoted in the Preface. "It was then that Franklin quietly drew from his pocket a piece of paper stating an unexpected counter claim, so cogent and of such kind that, rather than face it or dispute it, the English commissioners gave up their point at once. . . . On the day follow-

ing this masterly stroke the preliminary treaty was signed, sealed and delivered."

No biographer has ever said what this document was, and for the purposes of the play the author took the liberty of using the de Weissenstein letter as the document in question; for the secret negotiations were often given a fillip by what can only be termed the prankish side of Franklin's statesmanship, which cropped out again and again, even in the midst of serious affairs. Benjamin Waterhouse, an American physician, friend of Adams and of Jefferson, and kinsman of the Dr. John Fothergill who was one of Franklin's closest friends, relates with gusto the following incident in his *Letters of Junius*, page 236.

"Our own countryman, Dr. Franklin, practised a refined stroke of deception to benefit his country, by imposing a newspaper printed in his own house in France, for one printed in Boston which completely deceived the British Legation."

"The anecdote is worth recording here."

"While the doctor was soliciting the government of France to form an alliance offensive and defensive with the new States of America, the English Ambassador near that court sent a genuine Boston newspaper to the French minister containing an account of the defeat of the Americans with great loss, which statement was authentic, and retarded the negotiations. Franklin, who, as every one knows, was originally a printer, thereupon set to work in his own house, where

he always kept complete printing apparatus, and directly printed a counterfeit Boston newspaper, containing advertisements, anecdotes, speculations, and a little of everything common to our public prints of that day—together with an official account of a victory gained over the British troops, with loss of their cannon, etc. This was sent to the French Minister, and he sent it to Lord Stormount, the British Ambassador, who was confounded by the sight of it.”

Nor was this the first time that Franklin had so amused himself; for in the *Everyman* edition of his life, already referred to, there is a description of one of his edicts, *The Edict of the King of Prussia*, on page 246. “This thing was cast in the form of an exciting piece of newspaper intelligence, enclosing a verbatim version of the alleged startling edict. Scores of well informed folk were deceived by it for something more than a moment, and thousands were amused for at least a week.”

.This goes to prove that Franklin was not always the solemn and stately figure of the copy books. He had a keen sense of humor, and no one enjoyed a practical joke more than he did, as loungers who leaned too often on the iron rails surrounding his house in Philadelphia learned to their discomfort, when he secretly charged the rails with electricity, and watched with amusement the inevitable result! There can be no estimate of the man which does not take into consideration this characteristically human side.

NOTES ON STAGING

With simplicity as the keynote of what is frequently termed "the new stage art" the intricacies of an elaborate production have been reduced to a minimum.

At the present writing, when railroad fares make it almost impossible to send an elaborate production on the road, this simplification, this elimination of all detail, save that which is absolutely necessary, has become an art in itself, depending not on any "freak" ideas; but on actual monetary conditions. To people used to producing under such conditions, it will be seen at a glance that the play of *Franklin* can be staged with two sets: The first, a dark smoke-stained brown; the second, a neutral gray. By changing accessories, such as window curtains, cushions, desks, etc., this gray becomes gray-and-blue for Act III; gray-and-rose for the first scene of Act IV; and gray-and-gold for the last scene, where the arras of cloth of gold (stenciled with fleur de lis) is merely gilded oilcloth serving to hide the French windows of a previous scene.

In the theater, costumically speaking, the 18th century has been made unreal and fantastic through too much frippery and adornment. Men did not go about their business clad in suits of peach bloom satin, yet this is what many producers would have us believe!

Richard Mansfield was one of the first to give the 18th century a realistic setting. His production of Bernard Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple* showed people of the Colonial period sensibly clothed in linens and homespuns. By emphasizing sober colors and plain materials Mansfield conveyed an atmosphere of modernity, of actuality. His *Devil's Disciple* hardly seemed a costume play in the accepted sense of the word. Pictures of his production are still extant showing the dark-colored suits of the men, with plain white stocks, combined with dark waistcoats, ruffles of plain white linen, or no ruffles at all. Velvet, silk, satin and lace ruffles were for elaborate functions only. The women, for ordinary wear had simple dresses of material much like our challis. Powdered hair was for state occasions. Hair in its natural color graced every-day life. The changing of natural colored hair to a powdered wig, of plain linen ruffles to ruffles of lace, has an incalculable effect in 18th Century scenes. A touch here, a touch there, will instantly heighten or diminish the effect of a costume: will change a personality.

So much for the realistic, every-day dress of the 18th century: When it came to elaborate functions, where the scene portrayed society *en fete*, that was an entirely different matter—witness the peri-wigging and costume of the production of *Monsieur Beaucaire*. Yet a recent production of this play by a local stock company showed astounding ingenuity in the combining and re-combining of its elaborate costumes. As an example, one white satin over-dress appeared over three different

petticoats, blue, pale rose and white-and-silver, making three different costumes; as for the men, the nimbleness with which three complete suits of white satin, russet satin and black velvet were whipped into varying combinations, outfitting three different characters on three different occasions (nine combinations in all) left one amazed and half incredulous. To the eye of the average spectator it was an elaborate, multi-costumed play: To the eye of the dramatically discerning it was a *tour de force*.

Yet one does not need a local stock company to point the way:—Such productions as *Bonds of Interest* by the Theater Guild of New York have shown what could be done in the matter of magnificent costumes for small expenditure. In this play the cloaks and dresses of shimmering green-bronze, and red-bronze were none the less lovely because they were evolved by radiator bronze applied to such lustrous surfaces as oilcloth. Silver-and-blue and rose-and-gold brocades were obtained by stenciling inexpensive materials. Superb velvet cloaks in somber shades were metamorphized from portière plush, and even canton flannel. Indeed, with the use of the latter material Stuart Walker has wrought such marvels in some of his exotically costumed plays (noticeably those by Dunsany) that it evinces a touch of the stage alchemist. This bespeaks an eye to both studio and box office. It is a method which can be applied to any century, and particularly to the 18th.



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